



יום העצמאות ויום ירושלים

Appreciating and Celebrating Our Home

Compiled from שיחות given by Rav Blachman in (יום ירושלים תשע"ו) and ישיבת הכותל (יום העצמאות תשע"ט) ראשית

Compiled by: Moishy Rothman

Tonight is יום ירושלים. In truth, it's a very special day on multiple levels. I'd like to put this day in context and try to explain to you what it's all about. In truth, I think this is one of the most important things to talk about. It's interesting to point out, unfortunately, יום ירושלים has in recent years become nothing more than a municipal holiday. The Jew living in חיפה sees this as a mere local holiday. Different Jews react differently to the day. It has somehow become for the average citizen a day of barbecuing, trips and vacationing. It makes you feel that all you need is a Yankee game and it's a done deal. It's quite empty. The question is shouldn't this be much more? As Jews, as people of history, is there theological meaning to this day? Obviously, there is an element of הכרת הטוב, thanking G-d. This is an important thing to do. But is that all? Does this day have any theological significance? Is there something deeper behind this day?

First, we need redeem the day from just being about Jerusalem. We had a guest in KBY over שבת, R' Ben-Artzi, a בוגר הישיבה, and he gave multiple sessions discussing the context of the Six Day War and יום ירושלים. As I lived during that time, I would like to discuss what happened and explain the day in its historical context, ultimately seeing it in a theological background. For only if something can be seen in a broad, theological context will one be sure it won't wear off. When it's part of you and how you think, it grows and stays with you in life. The same thing applies to יום העצמאות and every Jewish holiday. One would hope that you don't think of הנוכה as something which just happened historically; rather, you see it as part of theology and somehow it effects your thinking and belief system. The idea of whether you say הלל or not is a technical issue. The Rav didn't say it with a ברכה. But for the Rav it had major theological ramifications. One who reads the book קול דודי דופק understands that he *needs* to see this in such a context. I repeat, don't

nitpick, "Do you do this custom or that custom." I find it myopic. There is so much more to this day. Believe me.

Many of you were not born in the '60s. I want you to understand that in 1967, this country was very small. Imagine Israel without Jerusalem. I remember coming to א"י in אלול תשכ"ד. There was only one street light in the whole Jerusalem: on the corner of Jaffa and King George. That's what it was. When you reached the end of מאה שערים you found the border. If you walked to fast you'd run into a Jordanian. People living on שמואל הנביא would have bullets going through their walls from legionnaires. How big was Israel at the time? Think of Netanya being 5 km from the border. Think of a small country of 2 million people. Now we have around 7. Then, her army was pretty good but weak and not sure of itself. In '56 we won a certain war, but we had to give it back because we were very vulnerable. Think of the fact that there was no American support. No one gave us anything. We ran between Czechoslovakian ammunition and French aid. Even during the Six Day War, De' Gaulle, the president of France, actually placed an embargo on this country. All you had were a few French airplanes. Think of that situation and all the Arab nations surrounding us at the time. The time had come to destroy the land of Israel. Think of the fact that גן העצמאות was sanctified as a בית קברות. They figured that הר המנוחות wouldn't be enough. Now understand the situation. We were in bad shape. If we are to thank G-d, we must thank Him for two things: הצלה משעבוד לגאולה and הצלה ממוות לחיים.

First let's start with הצלה ממוות לחיים. This was no joke. The threat was very real. The nations of world were just standing on the sidelines. America wasn't going to do a thing. There were no promises or any treaties at the time. This was the reality. When Nasser made a treaty with King Hussein of Jordan to fight. The Syrians and Iraqis joined in to push the Jews into the sea. This was the situation. Let's stop thinking of this as a municipal holiday of just the בית המקדש and the כותל. Let's think of the state of affairs. Think of the reality of 1948, that great legacy of a nation rising up like a phoenix from the ashes to, all of a sudden, become a footnote on the bottom of the page of history. The world was going to say, "The Jews tried it but it didn't work." People were scared stiff. יצחק רבין went into depression during the war. He actually didn't function. It was משה דיין who ran the army. He was the hero of the Six Day War. That's the context we're talking about.

I can't tell you the number of נסים ונפלאות that occurred within those first moments of the war. The strongest air force in the middle east was destroyed in mere hours. This is not the time, but it's worth reading about because if you *really* want to say הלל on something, you have to know what you're saying הלל for. We're talking about a הלל ממוות לחיים. Jerusalem was just the cream on the cake. The war started on כו אייר. On כה אייר we captured Jerusalem. On כט אייר we captured the hills around Jerusalem, the whole area. We didn't even want to go there. We begged Hussein to stop. We just wanted Nasser to stop. Even after we captured all the mountains we didn't want to go into the old city. I want you to understand this. But they went in and ב"ה look what we got. אשכול asked his generals how many casualties will there be. They said that if we knock out their air force, there will be only 40,000. If not there will be around 100,000. There were only around 300 casualties. Though every loss of Jewish life is significant, I just want you to see the ישועה that happened. Think of this in a broad context.

After כה אייר, the war continued until ב סיון and we ended up with total control of the גולן. All this in just six days. Each day has its own stories and its own נסים, but the total pattern of those six days is the following. א"י tripled herself and the threat to her existence, which was primarily from the Egyptian army, ceased to exist. The Egyptians were decimated. מדבר סיני was littered with shoes of soldiers who fled. They had nothing. We actually asked the UN for a ceasefire. Our job was done. There was euphoria. It was המקראית א"י was in our hands. We finally finished the job which started in 48. That's what this was. The threat to א"י became obsolete, at least, so we thought, at the time.

We must look at יום ירושלים in this context. It's the cherry of the cake. It must be seen in a much bigger and broader context. If it was just ירושלים, it's relegated to a mere municipal holiday. In truth, it's a day for all ישראל. It's much bigger. And the biggest problem is that we lost that. People don't see it that way anymore. Some people are not even aware of the situation and events anymore. Everyone's going to tell you about ירושלים but it's so much more; they won't tell you about the broad context in the broad scheme of קוממיות הארץ and its preservation. You don't understand the ramifications of such an event. That's what we must discuss today.

We talk about יום העצמאות and יום ירושלים as one big thing. As I said before you must see it in that context. So, I ask you what is its meaning to you? The typical boy will be here for a year or

two. Some may stay. Others will hope to come back. But most of you will come back to the comfort of the western world. And you'll be very patriotic. You will buy Israel bonds. But that's it. You'll be very happy that the Jews have some place in the Levant to call a home. And it's nice to see two triangles on a flag. But that's it. Then you'll pay lip service to Jewish custom; you'll say הלל over that. What are you *really* happy about? Does it *actually* make a difference to you? At least, for me, I live here; my family, my students, and my life is here. But what about celebration at a national level, on a broad level, a theological level? Does it mean anything?

I must say that I've learnt the importance of this day from my father. My father was a card-carrying אגודה-man. But on יום העצמאות in Chicago he would roll out a big blue and white flag. You know something, on July 4th he rolled about another flag. I asked him, "What's going on? This is not consistent?" He told me, as he typically did, "You will never understand because you were never experienced the events which occurred in my life." My father was a survivor. He lost everything. "You see the red, white and blue. That's the first hotel we had in history." You realize that until 1776, we were living under the proverbial bridge of history, drinking cheap wine. We were the homeless of history. The question is not of persecution. We didn't have a place to live. We were wanderers in History. That's a condition of its own. And finally, thank G-d for July 4. You know why? Because G-d gave us a hotel!

You know, that's a person who is real. He's a person who lives history; he understands it. He lives and feels the generations that precede him. That's the meaning of the עידיות in משנה which says that a father gives his child the generations that preceded him. That's going to be your job as parents of the future. Your job is to give over the previous generations, the history of the past in your language to your children. You have got to be a history man to understand who the Jews are. So, July 4 was a holiday for our family. Did we say הלל? No. But it doesn't matter. Because if you really appreciate the day, do you need to put it into formalities? Can't it just *be* good? Are we so unsure that we need it to be "x" to be happy?

Then I asked my father about the other flag, the white and blue one with the Star of David. He said, "I don't understand you. That's home!" It took us almost 200 years to walk from hotel to home, but we made it through the journey. We have a home! Yes, the pipes are clogged and we have some crazy neighbors, but it's home!

That conversation stayed with me and I decided to try to understand it. The only way one appreciates what it means to have a home is to see what it's like to be without one. I went to Riverside Park and saw a guy living in a cardboard box. Opposite him were some of the richest residents of the city. The contrast was quite blatant. Homelessness doesn't just refer to the affiliations and suffering experienced by man. Homelessness is a status. It is a person without roots. He has no identity. Homelessness is a person to whom nothing adds up. The home puts a person in his place. You know what a house is? You take all the dispersed elements, the kitchen, dining room table, cabinets etc. and contextualize them in the confines of your domain. All the different pieces add up together. That's what a house is. When you're homeless everything is disjointed. It may have a few leaks, but it's home. Things add up. I want to understand this in bigger depth.

People ask me, "Rabbi, do you have a source for this?" I tell them that there are times you have to try to understand from your own *cup*. Being influenced by the Torah you learnt, you see the world differently and you develop ideas even without the text. It's לבי אומר לי. The *Opter Rav* once said on the פסוק of תורה חדשה מאתי תצא . There's going to be a new Torah? חס וחס! It's not changing! It's one of the עיקרים? He answers that throughout history G-d tells us what to do and we listen. At the end, man finally cleans his act and tunes his antennas to His will. G-d will then ask us, "What do you feel?" and He will show us how that too is תורה. So, I'm going to do a little bit of תורה לאחרית הימים today.

Let's start with the following introduction. People mourn for three weeks between the 17th of Tammuz to the 9th of Av. During this time, each year, I'm in a dilemma. What's there to mourn about? Do you really miss barefoot, skirted priests slitting throats of goats and sprinkling their blood on an alter with *Levi'im* singing oriental music? Try listening to the Arab music on the radio! Are you into animal sacrifices? Can you imagine it. Millions of people in the old city on *Erev Pesach*, all crowded together. Do you want that? Are you looking forward for capital punishment? Do you want them to pour hot lead down people's throats? What do you think when you daven for השיבה שופטנו כבראשונה? That's what you're asking for! Do you really want משיח? Man, I like democracy. There's checks and balances and the ruler can't do whatever he wants. What's you

doing is asking for a theocracy. It's not like the "Kingdom of G-d" which in other religions became an allegory. This is real.

So, do you want it? Do you even aspire to want it? If you do, you'd better explain it to yourself because in some ways it's very hard to want to leave גלות. In some ways, you may think גלות is a great thing. Now we're free. We can be proper western citizens in a religious order called Judaism. We can live a life in which we feel comfortable. As of now, I think you *wish* to *will* to *want* to *aspire* to *feel* a need for גאולה. But *actually* wanting it... Now! That's hard. Life is comfortable in Scarsdale. Why come here? I just came back from America. The houses are so much larger than ours. The grass is greener. There's space. Why do you want to be here? It takes a conscious decision to recognize that that land is theirs, but this one is mine. But, if I may ask, is it *bad* to live in גלות? What's the tragedy of גלות?

In the תפילה לשלום המדינה, the נוסח is ראשית צמיחת גאולתנו, the first sprouting of our *redemption*. If you ever looked in the letters of רב קוק, he has a text to be ראשית צמיחת ישועתנו, the spouting of our *salvation*. What's the difference between redemption and salvation? If you need salvation, you are in a bad place. You need to be saved. But Redemption, that's a luxury. I'd like to be redeemed. But no one is attacking me here. If there is no redemption, I'll live in Woodmere.

But why do I even want to be redeemed? גלות is actually the place where we had the most religious growth! You read נ"ך and you see that religion was not doing well. אליהו didn't have that many clients. There was a king who was not the nicest of people. Compared to him, בן גריון was a *lamedvavnik*! These people were עובדי עבודה זרה and murderers. That's the truth. That was during the First Temple. Should we also talk about the Second Temple? You should know that for most of its history, the religious authority was in the hands of Hellenized Jews or *Tzeduk'im*. The כהונה גדולה was given to the highest bidder. It had nothing to do with Judaism. True, in the villages, the פרושים were successful, but in the big cities it was bad news. Think of it; when did religion thrive? You know when? *After* חורבן. It was only after we lost the nation state and the physical building of the בית המקדש did we start delving and developing the world of תורה תלמוד בבלי תלמוד. ש"ך ט"ז מג"א. רשב"א ריטב"א רמב"ן. Yes, חורבן-ירושלמי was made post-חורבן. They all came later. Not bad for גלות. The Gemara says we needed גלות for Torah to grow. במחשכים הושיבני כמתי עולם.

If so, what is the tragedy of גלות? I'll tell you what it is and it's a terrible tragedy. You see, G-d doesn't want a religion. He wants something bigger. He demands a way of life. G-d wants to be the point of reference of your culture. Religion is supposed to be your national culture. והיה זה המלך על כל הארץ doesn't mean wearing a crown. He's the embodiment of your national identity. You don't see them as people. As people, there is not much to write about. You see him as the embodiment of the people's culture. Whether it be the Windsors or the Tudors, you see the nation's history embodied in those people. I think of the כנסת not as the people who reside in the building. I think of it as a body expressing my national identity and that makes me feel ramrod straight and tall. I have confidence again. We lost that in גלות. Yes, true, it wasn't that religious when we had the בית המקדש. But the רמב"ם writes that the בית המקדש was the place where we were חוגגים עליו שלוש פעמים. In other words, you don't just happen to go עלייה לרגל to the מקדש; the very essence of the מקדש, its definition, is this very reason. You know what this is? It's a whole nation converging to the center point of its identity. Three times a year! You know what it's like having millions of people converge on one place? It's a national experience. It's not just a religious reality. It's the cultural one as well. We didn't just *do* religious things. You saw religion as a way of living. What does culture mean? It means you have ideals and values which are internalized, becoming the point of reference in the way you see the reality around you. It defines your language. It defines your feeling and relationship with the world around you.

Why is it that we in the western world have problems identifying with certain מצוות or עבירות? Sometimes I'm asked לא מתחבר לי. I don't connect with it. There is an emotional rift. Why? Because we lost that national identity and the מצוות and Torah are not our cultural identity. We are the products of history. The Polish Jew is Polish; Russian Jew is Russian. But that's who we are and we believe in the religious order, the Jewish synagogue. We had no national identity. Religion was demoted from a תרבות, a מלכות, into a דת. G-d was demoted from King to Head of religious order. That's not what G-d wants.

You daven on ר"ה about the מלך. What are you saying? You're saying, "G-d, I don't want You just as the reason of religion. I want You to be the point of my cultural identity." Ramban elaborates that those who listen to the מצוות and understand their depth can develop a unique, Jewish, and moral outlook. That's ועשית את הישר ואת טוב. You are told והאזנת למצוותיו, listen to the

music behind the מצוה. Take it away from just the limited, external act and see it in its broad context. Make it part of you and how you see things. That's what we're supposed to be doing. The tragedy of גלות is this.

The גרסי"ג says מפני תורה אלא אומנינו אומה. Now that's interesting. What does religion have to do with the nation? No one thinks Catholicism is a nation. Yet he writes that Torah decides our nationhood. That aspect of Torah we lost. Then what happened in the beginnings of the Zionist movement. Theodore Hertzl, quite an assimilated Viennese Jew, came along. He was heavily affected by the Dreyfus Affair in France. He realized that we must regain our national identity. There's an unbelievable eulogy of Theodore Hertzl by one of the greatest תלמידים of *Slabodka*. He was a *chevrusa* of my Rosh Yeshiva, R' *Chazkel Sarno*, HaRav *Avraham Eliyahu Kaplan*. He wrote a book called בעקבות היראה. He became the Rosh Yeshiva of בית רבנים of Berlin. Unfortunately, he passed away young. R' *Avraham Elya'* describes that when he looks at Hertzl, "He didn't teach us Torah, not even היראה." The man didn't teach us any Torah. He didn't grow up that way. But he taught us to say - "עברי אנכי" - "I am a Jew." This was not referring to my Jewish identity in the ישיבות. We're talking about the global, political arena. He taught us that we are Hebrews. That's our name. We are a nation, and that is a great thing indeed. It raises religion from being just a religion to being part of a national identity. Did he mean that? Probably not. But G-d did. It's through people like him great things happen. I don't need לשמה. I need the כלי for השגחה פרטית to bring the idea of nationhood back to עם ישראל. I want you to understand that this is the unique miracle, starting with מלחמת הקוממיות, we have come back to become a nation.

The funny thing is that the only institution which really understood the ramifications of this event was the Christian church. You want to understand what it means מאויבי תחכמי? You want to know the true significance of regaining our homeland; the meaning of getting back הירושלים? The meaning of קוממיות? Look at the Church. Let me explain.

I remember years ago I had to be in Paris on י"ז תמוז. What do you do in Paris on בתמוז? I decided to go to the *Louvre* to see the bust of Titus. This guy is giving me headaches. I wanted to see what he actually looked like. While walking, I entered a hall. In there, there was a replica of a very famous sculpture found in the cathedral of Strasbourg. It's called *Ecclesia and Synagoga*, the church and the synagogue. I want to describe it to you. Two young women, twins actually,

stood next to each other. One well adorned, well dressed. She wore a crown and held a staff, the staff of Christianity. She stands very beautifully and majestic. Next to her, stands her sister. The dress is torn. No crown is on her head. She's blindfolded with her staff broken. This was *Ecclesia and Synagoga*. Christian theology spanned for roughly 2,000 years. A major tenet of their faith was Supersessionism, Replacement Theology. It meant that Israel is the church and the seed of Abraham are no more the Jew. There is no more covenant. That's why it's the new testament, the Christians claimed that the old was over. That was the dominant view of Christianity for centuries. The Jewish nation ceases to exist. The staff of nationhood was broken in the synagogue. The church rules now. The *מדרש* predicted this reality as *עתידים אומות העולם לומר אנו ישראל*. That happened. The Jews were supposed to exist only as singular people, not as a nation, and to suffer for the fact that they rejected Christianity.

That went on for a while. They claimed *סר שבט מיהודה*. That was their theology. There was no more nation. You can be Jewish and religious, but you can't be a nation. You were thrown off into the diaspora. You'll never come back. You will be *יהודים זרה, כופרי עבודה זרה*, but you will never be *עברים*, a nation. And something happened. Out of the ashes of the Holocaust, G-d said, "the time has come." I don't know why. I'm not His lawyer. But believe me it's the truth. The time has come to tell the world *לא יסור שבט מיהודה*. Then the nationhood of Israel was regained. The church was in a major dilemma. It would have to revise their beliefs. At the time, the church didn't recognize the state of Israel. He was actually against it for many reasons. He was a terrible man for many reason, but theologically I can understand the thought process. The Jews have a nation. The recognition of a Jewish State would undermine a foundation of Christianity. Replacement theology would be thrown out the door. So, they declared that official policy denies the true recognition of the State, as the Jews don't have Biblical Israel. They don't have Jerusalem. They only occupy the lands of the Philistines.

Then comes 1967. They were sure it was over. But suddenly G-d showed them that we are here to stay. We are here to grow. Suddenly, we had it all. This was the major change which forced Catholicism to change its theology. It were forced to acknowledge that the Jews had a covenant. Replacement theology died then.

So much blood has been split during this period. The crusades happened during this month. **אב הרהמים** was instituted because of this month. Don't you understand **זה לאומת זה עשה**? This is the month when we were in the pits of history and this is the month when G-d actually picked us up. Whether you call it **אתחלתא דגאולה** or **סוף הגלות** or something else, at the moment it's not the focus. There is something much bigger going on here. It's all that but so much more. It's the reconfirmation that G-d hasn't left us. Our covenant was never torn up. The Jews are a nation. G-d has His covenant and we are Israel. It's actually a slap in the face of Replacement Theology. It's the greatest answer to what ever happened in the crusades. So **אייר** is the ultimate month of replacement and it's the month when **הקב"ה** gave it all to you. You have **כסא ה'** in this world.

The process of redemption has two models. **משיח בן יוסף** is a time in history when we will regain our national identity. We will regain our status as country. We will actually have an army a government. We will function as a nation. But that's not enough. That Zionism, external nationality, can't succeed. There must be a next step to this redemption called **משיח בן דוד**. This is **אתחלתא דגאולה**. This nation, a now developed **כלי**, will now be filled with a culture of **תורה** and **עבודה**. **ה'**. We have to take the Torah and put into our minds, make it our culture. We now must take that regained national identity and translate it as **כי מציון תצא תורה ודבר ה'**. Historically, Rav Kook tried to create a religious Zionist movement called **דגל ירושלים**. He says that the Zionist movement without the inner content will wither. Our job today is to raise the banner of **דגל ירושלים**. We need to fill this nation with **תורה**.

This is a city which embodies the spirit of **נבואה**. All prophecy starts from **מבין כרובים** and from there reaches the **נביא**. Prophecy is not just foretelling the future. As the **רמב"ם** explains, prophecy enhances our understanding of **הקב"ה**. Majority of the prophecies were not told to the public. They were made to enhance and give depth of understanding to the prophet who were teaching Torah. Today is the day. It's taking context of the broad Six Day war, understanding the theological upheaval it caused. It's this day. What's it all for? It's for **כי מציון תצא תורה ודבר ה'**. It's your job to teach yourselves and your children further. Take the regained national identity and see it through all of Torah and see it as something you identify with. For that, you need a lot of thinking and a lot of learning. You've got to run away from being the westerner who

just does religious acts to the person who lives and breathes תורה and its outlook. You need to take all that's found in ש"ס, all its ideas, grind it and distill it into how you see, think, and feel. That's the Torah of ציון.

The חינוך writes that this is the idea of מעשר בהמה which was brought to ירושלים. You know, people follow their money. In an agrarian society, there's a lot of מעשר שני and a lot of מעשר בהמה. During that period of time, every family had an enormous amount מעשר and you could only eat it in Jerusalem. So, what do you do? You take the money and go there. Jerusalem is a city of חכמה. It's the place of the סנהדרין and so much study. In Jerusalem, that's exactly what this Jewish farmer did. He was מתדבק with the חכמים who lived there and became a תלמוד חכם himself. What did this create? The חינוך explains that this process allowed for every family to have at least one תלמוד חכם in the family to teach them about religion. You didn't need to go to the local synagogue. Every family had someone by their table. He's the familial teacher. That's the focus of תצא תורה כי מציון תצא תורה. That's יום ירושלים for me. So, raise your flag and thank G-d that you're not homeless anymore. Thank G-d you regained true national identity. Thank G-d that we are in an amazing time in our history in which we have the capabilities of moving the next stage, filling that nationhood with the spirit of תורה ויראת שמים.