

Shabbat Parashat Naso Jerusalem – The Heart of the Jewish People

This past week on Wednesday, we celebrated *Yom Yerushalayim*/Jerusalem Day - the 44th anniversary of the unification of Jerusalem - achieved as one of the successful military campaigns of the Six Day War in 1967. This accomplishment was a monumental event in Jewish history. After almost 2000 years of exile from Jerusalem's Old City, Jews could once again have access to our most holy sites, including the Kotel, the only remnant of our magnificent Temple Mount. Also for the first time in generations, Jerusalem was opened up to the world. People of all religions and backgrounds were welcome to visit this holy city, witness its beauty and glory, and soak up its majesty. Jerusalem, the capital of the Jewish State in the Land of Israel, was once again whole and serving its rightful role as a center for all peoples and faiths that wished to make it so.

In recent weeks, debate over the borders of the State of Israel was in the news once again. President Barak Obama suggested that, perhaps, a path toward peace between Israel and the Palestinians would be for Israel to accept a return to pre-1967 green line borders, the borders in which Jerusalem was a divided city. From other sources, Israel was called upon to alter the status of Jerusalem and to convert it into something of an "international city," no longer serving as the capital of the State of Israel. Leaders from around the world spoke out on these subjects (mostly in favor of the "suggestions"), including Prime Minister Stephen Harper who adamantly defended Israel's right to maintain its current, and more militarily defensible, borders. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu spoke before the U.S. Congress, explaining that Israel, as the only democratic and truly modern nation in its region, is not the problem in the Middle East and rejected the suggestion that a return the 1967 borders would be appropriate. The fact is that if one looks at Jerusalem's 3000-year history, she has never been more of a welcoming and international city than she is today. Prior to 1967, the nations and empires that controlled access to Jerusalem and her holy sites were exclusive. Today, Israel is inclusive, opening up her doors and investing not only in the building and restoration of Jewish holy sites, but those of other religions as well.

It is indeed true that Jerusalem is a holy city for the world's three cousin religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam (let it be noted, however, that Jerusalem is not mentioned even once in the Koran). However, where Judaism's connection to Jerusalem stands out is with the city's role as the beating heart and focal point of the Jewish people. This is a unique characteristic of Judaism. When we stand in prayer, Jews around the world all face toward Jerusalem. Jews in Jerusalem itself face whatever direction is necessary to be directed toward the Old City. Within the Old City, one faces the direction of the Kotel. For lack of a better expression, Jerusalem and the Kotel are the bull's eye of Judaism, toward which we direct the darts of the innermost expressions of our hearts and souls. Judaism cannot be properly understood without its connection to Jerusalem. It is from her that we draw our spiritual and national strength. Jerusalem is our unifying force and our inspiration.

In school on Wednesday afternoon, we had a moving video about Jerusalem available for public view in the main hallways of the school. If you missed it, please take the five minutes necessary to watch it by clicking on the link below. I promise that it will be well worth the time and serve as a lovely way to transition into Shabbat, during which we either consciously or subconsciously focus a great deal of our attention and spirit toward our religious and national capital, *Yerushalayim shel Zahav*, Jerusalem of Gold.

May Jerusalem always maintain her place as our physical and spiritual center and may we all have the strength to guarantee to make it so.

Shabbat Shalom!

Enjoy the link: <http://tinyurl.com/heartofthejewishpeople>