

MAY 7, 2018

## Parashat Behar – Bechukotai Yom Yerushalayim

### A Vision For Zion and Jerusalem

“From Zion shall go forth Torah” (Micah 4:2, Isaiah 3:2)

כי מציון תצא תורה (מיכה ד:ב, ישעיהו ג:ב)

This past December, President Donald Trump announced that the U.S. embassy will be moved to Jerusalem, fulfilling his 2016 campaign promise to implement the 1995 Jerusalem Embassy Act, a bipartisan law requiring that the U.S. embassy in Israel be located in Jerusalem, Israel’s capital. The official opening of the embassy is scheduled for this coming week, on May 14th—and we in the Jewish community are quite proud to celebrate this accomplishment. The choice of this date is not coincidental as Ambassador to the U.S. Ron Dermer alluded to in a tweet: “70 years apart. Two historic decisions. One united capital,” referencing May 14<sup>th</sup> being the same day that President Harry Truman’s recognized Israel in 1948. Israeli Ambassador to the United Nations Danny Danon also [praised](#) the move, saying, it “is testament to the unbreakable alliance and true friendship between the U.S. and Israel.” He urged other members of the United Nations to follow suit, “The time is now for all UN member states to follow in the footsteps of the U.S. and declare that they, too, recognize, Jerusalem as the eternal capital of the State of Israel.”

Twice in the Bible, the Jewish people are told an identical message: *Ki m'tzion tetzah Torah u'dvar Hashem m'Yerushalayim* — “From out of Zion shall go forth Torah and the word of God from Jerusalem (Micah 4:2, Isaiah 2:3). What is the difference between the terms Zion and Jerusalem? These two words describe the same place, but they reflect two different ideas. Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, the first Chief Rabbi of Mandatory Palestine, suggested that the word Zion refers to a unique place that strives to attain its distinctive spiritual qualities. The word, *tziyon*, or *zion* literally means “marked” or “distinguished.” Jerusalem, on the other hand, indicates the holy city’s function as a spiritual center, providing teachings and wisdom that enhance and inspire the many nations of the world. Simply stated, the term Zion connotes looking inward and highlighting the city’s significance for the Jewish people, while Jerusalem looks outwards, at the city’s external role as a spiritual focal point for the entire world. The Hebrew for Jerusalem, *Yerushalayim*, contains within it the root letters *shin*, *lamed*, *mem*, which spell *shalom* (“peace” or *shalem* (“whole”). Once again, the essence of Jerusalem is a vision of wholeness and peace that is at the center of what *Yerushalayim* hopes to achieve for all people.

The Jewish connection to Jerusalem runs deep: For more than three millennia, the city has played a central role in the lives of Jews throughout the world. Jerusalem is mentioned more than 800 times in the Hebrew Bible, and there are thousands of references to the city in rabbinic literature. One of Jerusalem’s hills was the setting for the famous biblical story in which the patriarch Abraham prepared to sacrifice his son Isaac. Hundreds of years later, King David made Jerusalem Israel’s capital, his son Solomon built the first Jewish Temple there; years later, a second, larger Temple would be built on the same spot.

The U.S.’s recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital conveys critical [messages](#). First, recognition that Jerusalem is Israel’s capital, along with the move of the U.S. embassy there, sends a strong message that America will not allow the Palestinians to hold U.S. policy hostage to their unwillingness to resume negotiations with Israel. Secondly, the recognition is an important rejection of those in the international community, like UNESCO, who promote the anti-Semitic canard that denies the 3,000-year continuous Jewish connection to Jerusalem. And a third point should be noted. Recognition and relocating the U.S. embassy does not preclude future negotiations between the parties over the city’s final status and borders.

The Jewish people join hands with others in the pro-Israel community in celebrating this historic moment. We convey our deep sense of gratitude to the United States and its leadership for this expression of friendship and solidarity with the state of Israel. May the coming days be a time of great blessing and may this auspicious moment in the U.S. and Israel alliance help bolster the possibility and real potential for Zion and Jerusalem to be a unified entity to fulfill her deepest visions and highest aspirations. ■

## The Heart of the Nation

A city [of Jerusalem] that is connected as one (Psalms 122:3)

עיר שחברה לה יחדו (תהילים קכב:ג)

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This coming week on *Yom Yerushalayim*, the State of Israel and Jews around the world will celebrate the 51st year since the reunification of Jerusalem in 1967. On this day, the city of Jerusalem is bedecked with flags and young people fill the streets and the Western Wall plaza in song and dance. Just a year ago, in celebration of Jerusalem's jubilee, the United States Senate unanimously approved the commemoration of the special anniversary. Authored by Senate Majority leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) and Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY), the bipartisan [resolution](#) recognized “that there has been a continuous Jewish presence in Jerusalem for 3 millennia” and hailed Jerusalem as a “united city in which the rights of all faiths have been respected and protected” since 1967. From 1948 to 1967, Israeli citizens from all religious backgrounds and Jewish people from all nationalities could not access Jerusalem's Old City and holy sites. Today, the city of Jerusalem is a place of religious freedom for all faiths.

What is so special about Jerusalem for the Jews? The Talmud (*Bava Kama* 82b) describes the unique status of Jerusalem, which unlike all other portions of Israel, was not given to any one tribe. The most obvious reason for this was in order to avoid jealousy among the tribes—to prevent them from arguing over the privilege of having Jerusalem in their portion. Rabbi Aaron Lichtenstein, a well-known Talmudic scholar, [offered](#) the following insight regarding the uniqueness of Jerusalem. The fact that Jerusalem belongs to no individual issues to us a call to elevate ourselves above egotism symbolized by private acquisitiveness. Second, we need to rise above tribal sectarianism. Lest any particular group wish to claim exclusive rights to Jerusalem, we need to declare in response that Jerusalem was not given to any of the tribes. Similarly, each stone of the breastplate that was worn by the High Priest emphasizes a different tribe and only a breastplate with all twelve stones in place is fit for use. Thirdly, it is true that the government is located in Jerusalem; Jerusalem is the heart of the nation. But at the same time, Jerusalem was not given over completely to mortal rule. The Jew lives in, what our ancient tradition calls the “earthly Jerusalem”—*Yerushalayim shel mata*, but we need to remember that this physical city faces the parallel “heavenly Jerusalem”—*Yerushalayim shel ma'ala*, (Talmud *Ta'anit* 5a). We need to rise above the human and national plane and reach for the plane of Divine service; we must attempt to recognize the Divine Presence in the city. It is true that even the most distant Jew feels something in their heart at the mere mention of the name Jerusalem, but this is not sufficient. The feeling of unity and completeness, of elevation above egotism driven by a value system based on kindness and uprightness, is the goal and grand vision for our Holy City.

Speaking at AIPAC's annual conference a couple of months ago, US Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley [said](#) that Jerusalem being the capital of Israel is a “fact not created by location of an embassy or by an American decision...Jerusalem was, is and will always be the capital of Israel. That's a fact. What President Trump did, to his great credit, was recognize a reality that American presidents had denied for too long. Jerusalem is the capital of Israel. And President Trump had the courage to recognize the fact when others would not.” The support of the U.S. government for Israel and for its capital, the city of Jerusalem, is even more significant and special at this time when Israel and the Jewish people worldwide will celebrate Jerusalem Day.

We as Jews beam with pride knowing that today Jerusalem is Israel's largest city and a dynamic and multicultural metropolis, which has served as the Jewish people's historic and spiritual capital for 3,000 years. After the 1967 Six-Day War the Jewish State immediately abolished restrictions on access to the city, allowing people from all faiths to worship at their holy places. This policy is one example as to why there exists such a deep [bond](#) that ties together the U.S. and the State of Israel. Israel is a unique sanctuary of democracy, freedom and pluralism in the Middle East protecting its citizens' rights while upholding the core values that it shares with America. The two countries have developed a resilient friendship, based in large part on an unshakable dedication to common values. At this special anniversary for our beloved city of Jerusalem, we as a community are called upon to strengthen, protect, and promote the U.S.—Israel relationship in ways that enhance the security, well being, and success of both the United States and Israel. ■

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