

Yom Haatzmaot 2014

by Rabbi Jerry M. Danzig

70 CE: the Romans destroyed the Temple and pushed all the Jews out of Jerusalem. A fragmented Jewry spread out and became a world-wide diaspora. The Jews might have lost the battle in 70 CE, but the Romans will not have the last word, nor will their civilization succeed the Jewish civilization.

You see, the Temple they destroyed, which represented the unity of a people and Jerusalem, mysteriously ascends to a temporary, imagined holding place. Where? In heaven! We read in the Talmud תענית ה:א

ואמר ליה רב נחמן לרבי יצחק: מאי דכתיב (הושע י"א) בקרבך קדוש ולא אבוא בעיר

Further, R. Nahman said to R. Isaac: What is the meaning of the scriptural verse, "When there is something holy in your midst and I (God) will not come in to the city?" (Hosea XI, 9) 11

, משום דבקרובך קדוש לא אבוא בעיר? -

"[Surely it cannot be that] because there is something holy in your midst God will not come into the city!"

אמר ליה, הכי אמר רבי יוחנן: אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא לא אבוא בירושלים של מעלה עד שאבוא לירושלים של מטה.

He replied: Thus said R. Johanan: The Holy One, blessed be He, said, 'I will not enter the heavenly Jerusalem until I can enter the earthly Jerusalem.' God awaits the building of the earthly Jerusalem so that He can enter the Heavenly Jerusalem. What inspiring imagery!

ומי איכא ירושלים למעלה? - "Is there then a heavenly Jerusalem?"
אין, דכתיב (תהלים קכ"ב) ירושלים הבנויה כעיר שחברה לה יהוה.

Yes; for it is written, Jerusalem thou art builded as a city that is associated with it. (Ps. CXXII, 3.)

For two millennia a collective Jewish soul has been wandering over the world -- romantically longing for its glorious past, waiting to be redeemed from lands of exile. And, to assure that the Jewish people do not forget that they have lost their sovereignty, the rabbis attached to every biblical holiday other than Yom Kippur, a *Yom Tov d'gulut*, the additional holiday reminding us that we are in *galut*. The original rationale for יום טוב שני that the exact time of the phases of the moon were uncertain, is no longer valid and the word "דגליות" could have been left out.

Over the centuries, the historic Jewish soul touched millions of lives, and they embraced it, nurtured it, and kept it buoyant throughout their Diaspora by, of all things, **prayer**. תפלה

To keep alive the hope that ירושלים של מטה will someday be rebuilt, *galut* comes to an end so that God, in the rabbinic imagination will be able to enter the מעלה של ירושלים ---- the rabbis declared that at least three times each day we recite

וְתִחְזַקְנָה עֵינֵינוּ בְּשׁוּבְךָ לְצִיּוֹן בְּרַחֲמֶיךָ..

And let our eyes behold thy return to Zion.

And the rabbis charged that after meals we recite:

ובנה ירושלים עיר הקדש במהרה בימינו..

May the holy city of Jerusalem be rebuilt quickly in our time.

And every morning before closing their eyes to say the שמע, shall goers and daveners

recited:

וְהִבִּיאֵנוּ לְשָׁלוֹם מֵאַרְבַּע כַּנְפוֹת הָאָרֶץ, וְתוֹלִיכֵנוּ קוֹמְמִיּוֹת לְאַרְצֵנוּ,

May we be brought in peace from the four corners of the earth and walk upright to our land!

These were not rote words or songs. When recited with כּוּוּנָה, with a determination and passion, these תּפִּלוֹת for thousands of years and for millions of Jews over the centuries were daily reminders of the hopes of the Jewish people.

I am convinced that תּפִּלָּה is efficacious when תּפִּלוֹת keep us conscious of our hopes, our values, our aspirations and our connection to our people and to the land of our promise. I do not know how תּפִּלוֹת affect what goes on in heaven.

This is what Soloveitchick meant in his brilliant essay, איש הלכה the Person of Law. The purpose of הלכה which includes תּפִּלָּה is to bring God down, not to try to ascend and escape to heaven. To bring ירושלים של מעלה back down to earth.

The concern today is that the efficacy of תּפִּלָּה as reminders of our mission statement, is fading as the critical mass of shall goers and daveners is dramatically diminishing and with it, the dreams and hopes in the סְדוּר fades from Jewish consciousness.

For 2000 years prayer was the primary defence of the Jew against church and state antagonisms. The prayerful-hopeful Jewish soul endowed hundreds of generations dispersed throughout the world with strength and dignity. תּפִּלָּה kept our people, scattered among the nations, connected. It encouraged them to live, to never lose hope that someday: soul, people and land of Israel would be reunited to continue to create once again its own history.

Destined to wander through Europe, the נשמה is subjected to a history not of its own making, but a history written by other nations. The נשמה emerged out of the inquisitions, auto-de-fe, ascending with the words אני מאמין, *Ani Maamin*, and descending again in another soul, in another country. The soul laughs and cAniries in the שטעטל but will not come to rest there. The שטעטל becomes the address of pogroms.

The age of enlightenment brightens the prospect for the Jew to settle down and become a citizen of the so-called civilized new world. The Jew is loyal to any land that would grant them the title 'citizen.' After 2000 years of disenfranchisement, maybe now we will taste the fruits of citizenship and be treated as equals.

But the נשמה is a wise and perceptive soul -- After 2000 years as a world traveler, the Jewish soul able to distinguish the virtual from the reality. The נשמה remains cautious; justifiably anxious about its security in alien lands.

Covered with ashes, the collective נשמה rose up again from the Holocaust of 6 million, chanting אני מאמין: *we believe*, and as long as we believe, we will live to be the authors of our own history again.

Concentrated, like a nuclear pulp, the spirit of the Jewish נשמה releases the latent power stored for 2000 years in תּפִּלָּה and resulted in the miraculous rejuvenation of the Jewish civilization. Invigorated by a passionate and energetic remnant, the historical Jewish נשמה finally returns with the refrain of התקוה to a sovereign Jewish state in which alone can there ever be fulfillment of the Jewish destiny, prejudiced only by its own limitations.

This evening we are observing יום הזכרון, which was established unofficially with the founding of the State of Israel in 1948, and enacted into law in 1963, the day preceding *Yom Ha'atzmaut*. יום הזכרון is a Memorial Day for soldiers who lost their lives in battle or while otherwise defending Israel.

On this יום הזכרון, we remind ourselves that having returned to our ancient homeland, heaven and earth, body and soul have come together for us. While תפלה kept the dream alive, it was human lives who created the reality and security of the State of Israel. On this יום הזכרון we are reminded of the 4000 Israeli soldiers and 2400 civilians who were killed in the 1948 War of Independence. That doesn't sound like very much, but it was equivalent to 1,254,000 Americans, who, in 1948, numbered 141.39 million! We are also reminded of the 7000 plus Israel Defence Forces killed in subsequent wars and terrorist attacks.

Because of them, we in חוץ לארץ and the Israelis today are able to celebrate the 66th year of the sovereign Jewish State of Israel. Because of the ultimate sacrifice made by thousands in the past, we live in a different world-reality than did exiled Jews from 70 ce to 1948.

Our very Jewishness has become rejuvenated. Our very identity and self-esteem have been augmented and nurtured by the State of Israel. Hebrew, no longer just the language of ancient liturgy, is now the living language of a nation, and Hebrew prayers everywhere in the world have been revitalized. Israel propelled us out of the passive, defensive role of Galut Jews, into active, vibrant co-authors of our own Jewish history again. We have become liberated, all of us, you and I, personally, from the constraints of exile.

With the miraculous reunion of the Jewish soul with its physical landscape, *Galut* ended for every Jew, and you and I now live in the diaspora by choice -- no longer because we have nowhere to go. The 300 Jews living fearfully in anti-semitic Norway have a place to go when they are ready to leave. When leaflets, recently, dropped in Ukraine, regardless by whom, demanding Jews, considered enemies of the state, identify themselves, the Jews have their own country of refuge. As inexplicable virulent anti-semitism spreads throughout Europe, where reminders of the Holocaust are everywhere, Jews are no longer stuck; they can be secure in the knowledge that the State of Israel is there for them.

It is in the State of Israel where Jewish history, shaped and determined by Jews, picks up again. And when this 66 year state of war ends, we can entertain the prospects of developing a society based on the noblest Judaic and prophetic ideals of equality and justice, which was our dream in 1948. Speaking of justice, in the Middle East it is only in Israel that a panel of three judges led by George Karra, an Arab Judge, could sentence the former president of Israel (Moshe Katav) to seven years in jail. (March 22, 2011).

Last year, The State of Israel set up a field hospital on the border of Syria to medically treat Syrian refugees.

In June 1977, a boatful of 66 Vietnamese men, women and children, out of food, dehydrated, extremely weak, were lost at sea in a boat that was leaking. In spite of their desperate SOS signals, ships from East Germany, Norway, Japan and Panama passed them by.

An Israeli cargo ship on its way to Japan saw them and brought all the

passengers on board. The Israeli captain and crew immediately gave them food and water. They were brought to Israel, were granted assylum and than citizenship and now comprise a thriving community.

In 2007 hundreds of Muslim refugees from Darfur who sought refuge, were pushed out of every Muslim country they traversed - they found refuge in, of all places, the State of Israel and were granted citizenship.

In 2005, Sudanese refugees began fleeing Egypt for Israel 1291 miles from Sudan. They crossed the Sinai on a rigorous and harrowing journey. As refugees first began crossing the porous border between Egypt and Israel, Egyptian border police were ordered to shoot anyone they saw and diligently followed their command. Those who managed to enter Israel alive were often wounded or starving. The Israeli military treated those in need of food and medical attention and then detained the refugees.

Since 2006, approximately 60,000 migrants, mostly from Eritrea and Sudan, have crossed into Israel through the then-porous border with Egypt. This influx of illegal immigrants continue to be a political and social challenge for Israel.

Hospitalized Palestinian partients are given the same care and accommodation as Jewish patients. thousands of Palestinian students attend universities throughout Israel alongside Jewish students.

These are but a few such events that exemplify the realization of the dream fulfilled by a Jewish state, - to be a light to the nations and a beacon of humanitarianism.

And Israel is accused of being an apartheid state? Even Jimmy Carter apologized and retracted such an accusation as he made in his book Palestine, Peace Not Apartheid. But the word got out and caught on.

What the young State of Israel has given to the world culturally, technologically, and medically would fill volumes. Did you know, In 2012, Israel had more companies listed on the NASDAQ stock exchange than any country outside the United States, save China; that in October 2012, the Wall Street Journal nominated Tel Aviv as "one of the planet's most innovative cities in its City of the Year contest!" For example, I urge you to look up InSightec, a company partnered with the Technion, and see what the development of the operating room of the future will look like and how almost all surgical procedures will be performed without cutting into the body. Look it up. InSightec. Take pride.

יום זה is יום הזכרון a day to remember and to remind. Spread the word to your fellow Jews, especially those who are indiscriminantly critical of Israel and to the BDSers. This is one reason to celebrate יום העצמאות, to remind us that, after 2000 years, the Jewish nation emerged and united its civilizational components: land, language, government, judiciary, art, music, literature, laws, myths, traditions, and national and religious observances. And it happened in OUR TIME!

But we must also remember that Israel is only 66 years old and has yet to know a moment not in a state of war. We of all people must be patient and understanding, constructively critical but zealously supportive during these terror-ridden times. The State of Israel is still struggling to ensure the security of its citizens and the opportunity to define its true nature and character as a Jewish state. Even today, Israel is not entirely free to determine its own destiny. The ideals of the State of Israel, its democratic principles, have been compromised and brutalized by years of war and terrorism, constant rockets by its neighbors whose charter calls for the destruction of

the Jewish state. How should Israel respond?

This is the first יום הזכרון in the Jewish year. The next one is on Rosh Hashanah when we recite מקדש ישראל ויום הזכרון. On the יום הזכרון of Rosh Hashana, we are called upon to do תשובה. On this יום הזכרון also, we are also called upon to do תשובה, which literally means “response,” “answer.”

We are not called upon to join the IDF, Israel Defense Forces, who put their lives in harms way, but we, who live the comfort and security of this country, are called upon to become members of the FDI -- Forces in Defense of Israel -- my designation. Rather than picking up rifles, we are called upon to pick up our pens, our computers and do תשובה and respond to anti-Israel media and propaganda whenever it raises its ugly head. The war of words Israel is fighting today is just as lethal and life threatening as bullets and rockets.

This is not a struggle for the State of Israel alone. It is about you and me as well, because today we are now inextricably bound with the State of Israel. It has been acknowledge by many scholars that what is deeply rooted in the anti-Israel sentiment pervasive in Arab countries and throughout Europe is a malignant animosity toward Jews. The Protocols of Zion, originating in Europe, is a best seller in Egypt. The Arabs have been very successful in exporting anti-Israel, anti-Jewish sentiment and planting it in the fertile ground of Europe and in many universities in America. This is as personal as it gets for you and me. יום הזכרון - a day to remember!

I urge you to do תשובה on this יום הזכרון by writing to Secretary of State John Kerry, who, a week ago today, invoked the word “apartheid” referring to the State of Israel. He might apologize for “using the wrong word,” but his sentiment came out, just like those leaflets flying around in Ukraine and Jimmy Carter’s book. The word came out, not by just any politician, but by the Secretary of State of the United States. With this expression, he gave validation and encouragement to the enemies of Israel. You can be an FDI’er, a force in the defense of Israel. Write to Mr. Kerry. Tell him how objectionable and inappropriate you found his comments and that as chief diplomat of this country, he violated his charge. Send a copy to President Obama, Senators Feinstein and Boxer.

If collectively we do תשובה and respond throughout the year with the power of the pen whenever the State of Israel is unjustly attacked, then maybe we can put a stop to the bullets and rockets and hopefully celebrate next year, the 67th יום העצמאות, with a State of Israel secure and in peace. Let us say, אמן

GLOSSARY

תפלות תפלה	<i>T'fillah</i> , Prayer; <i>T'fillote</i> , Prayers
ירושלים של מעלה	<i>Y'rushalayim shel maalah</i> , Jerusalem on High
ירושלים של מטה	<i>Y'rushalayim shel Matah</i> , Jerusalem Below (earthly)
יום טוב שני	<i>Yom Tov Sheni</i> , 2nd day of Yom TKov
דגליות	<i>D'galiut</i> , of Exile
כוונה	<i>Kavanah</i> , with intention, meaningfully
הלכה	<i>Halachah</i> , Law
איש הלכה	<i>Ish Halachah</i> , The Man of <i>Halachah</i>
יום העצמאות	<i>Yom Haatzmaut</i> , Independence Day
יום הזכרון	<i>Yom Hazikarton</i> , Memorial Day
שטעטל	<i>Shtetl</i>
נשמה	<i>N'shama</i> , Soul
מקדש ישראל ויום הזכרון	"Sanctify Israel and this day or remembrance
אני מאמין	<i>Ani Maamim</i> , I Believe
תענית ה:א	(Talmud Tractate) <i>Taanit</i> , 5a
שמע	<i>Sh'ma</i> , Hear O Israel, etc
חוץ לארץ	<i>Chutz La-aretz</i> , Outside (The Land of Israel)
סדור	<i>Siddur</i> , Prayer Book
התקווה	<i>Hatikvah</i> , Hope (Israel's National Anthem)
תשובה	<i>T'shuvah</i> , Respond; Answer; Repentance