

ADDRESS TO COLLEGE YOUTH  
(Yavneh, Bnei Akiva, Mizrachi Hatzair)  
First Yom Yerushalayim

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The great festival we shall celebrate next week is known by two names. In the Bible it is called Shavuot, "Weeks." In the Mishnah, however, it is known as Atzeret -- which means binding or conclusion or climax. Our tradition tells us that it is called by this name because, like the eighth day of Sukkot, which is known as Shemini Atzeret, this festival of Shavuot is the climax of a long development. Even as Shemini Atzeret is the conclusion of the Sukkot holidays, so, in a sense, is Shavuot the conclusion, and hence the atzeret, of the period begun with Passover.

Now, while this is certainly an adequate and reasonably accurate explanation, there is some troubling question about it. Why is it that in the case of Sukkot the waiting period before the atzeret is but one week, whereas between Passover and its atzeret seven weeks must elapse?

Various answers have been offered to explain this. Now, however, for the first time in history -- there is no longer any question! This year, and hereafter for all eternity, Shavuot shall be known as the atzeret after the one-week rededication to the God of Israel! For this is the week between Yom Yerushalayim on the 28th of Iyyar, and the zeman mattan toratenu on the sixth day of Sivan.

Indeed, as we gather for this first Yom Yerushalayim in Jewish history, let us emphasize specifically those aspects of our present festival for which Shavuot is truly the atzeret, namely, the theme of revelation. There are three types of hitgalut or revelation which occurred one year ago today, and for which the celebration of mattan torah, the giving of the Torah, is a logical climax. This will require deep thinking on our part, because as Jews we believe that God reveals Himself primarily in historical events; and to see this requires, as Yehudah Halevy called it, an "inner eye," it makes demands upon our attention and reflection.

It is more than coincidence, I believe, that these three forms of revelation correspond neatly to three historic names associated with Jerusalem.

The oldest name for Jerusalem that we know of is Shalem. When Abraham came to the city in ancient days he found a fellow Semite, Malkizedek, who was the priest of Shalem, which at that time was already a shrine of incipient monotheism. The Rabbis maintain that the city had received its name Shalem even earlier -- by the founder of all the Semitic tribes, Shem the son of Noah.

What does Shalem mean? Usually we understand that it is a form of the word Shalom, peace. That is true, although Jerusalem throughout most of its life has suffered the ravages of war rather than the blessings of peace. It is true too that Jerusalem is a focus of all our prayers for its peace and for the peace of all mankind.

Nevertheless, this is more of derash, interpretation. Today we have gathered to declare the supremacy of peshat over derash, of the simple literal meaning of the word over all interpretive meanings: Shalem means whole, complete, total, united. We have come to declare our joy that there is only one whole Jerusalem! There are no longer two Jerusalems! Despite Russia, despite the Arabs, despite all the African nations which benefited from Israeli experience and help only to betray her, despite England, despite the United Nations -- Jerusalem is today once again Shalem.

This reunification is in itself a revelation of divine concern. "The land which the eyes of the Lord behold always, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year." And this holds especially for Jerusalem, even more than for the rest of the Land of Israel. God reveals Himself in this historic event, and this revelation bears the most serious consequences for our whole world-view as religious Jews.

What is the nature of this revelation? It was the manifestation of divine gevurah, power, responding to Israel's initiative and affirming that, against all odds, Israel's power was blessed by divine power so that it and it only would retain the apple of its eye -- Jerusalem!

But to be honest, not everyone agrees that God had anything at all to do with this victory one year ago. There are others who are loathe to assent to the religious interpretation, and, naturalis-

tically inclined, prefer to explain the event diplomatically and politically, psychologically and militarily. And this in itself is a most significant fact, and makes the conquest of Jerusalem more important than if God Himself were to undertake a full, direct, and unmistakable revelation of His Will as He did at Mt. Sinai.

Permit me to explain. The Talmud (Shab. 88a) tells us that when the Lord revealed Himself at Sinai, Kafah alehem har ke'gigit, He, as it were, lifted up the mountain and held it over the heads of the Israelites gathered below as if it were a cask, and He said to them: "If you accept the Torah, good and well; but if not, sham tehei kevuratkhem -- I shall drop the mountain on your heads, and here shall be your burial place." The Rabbis then drew the logical conclusions from this implication that the Israelites were coerced into accepting the Torah. R. Aha b. Yaakov maintained that if this is the case, then modaa rabbah l'oraita -- this becomes a strong protest against the obligatory nature of the Torah, it is "giving notice" to God that the Torah is not permanently binding, for the Torah is in the nature of a contract between God and Israel, and a contract signed under duress is invalid.

The other Rabbis of the Talmud treated this objection with great seriousness. Thus, Rava agreed that, indeed, the Torah given at Sinai was not obligatory because of the reason stated: af-al-pi-ken hadar kibluha bi'yemei Akashverosh -- however, the Israelites reaffirmed the Torah voluntarily in the days of the Purim event; Kiymu mah she'kiblu kevar after their deliverance from Haman, the

Israelites affirmed their voluntary acceptance of the Torah which they originally were forced to accept at Sinai. Therefore, since the days of Mordecai and Esther, we no longer possess the claim of modaa rabbah l'oraita, of denying the obligatory nature of Torah because we accepted it originally under duress; for we affirmed it out of our own free will in the days of the Purim episode.

What the Rabbis meant, I submit, is this: a moral act is authentic only if it issues out of a genuine freedom of choice. The Torah is meaningful only if man is free to accept it or reject it. Spiritual life is senseless where it is coerced. "See," the Torah tells us, "I give you this day life and death, benediction and malediction, and you shall choose life." God gives us the alternative, and we are free to choose.

Therefore, if I am forced at gun-point to violate the Sabbath, I cannot be held responsible for my action. I am not guilty, because my act partakes of the nature of ones, compulsion. But coercion can be not only physical, but also psychological -- as when a man performs a criminal act in a seizure of insanity or other mental distress. Both the physical and psychological deeds are characterized as ones. Even more so, extreme spiritual excitement also implies a denial of freedom and therefore lack of responsibility. Hence, if suddenly I am confronted by the vision of an angel who commands me to perform a certain mitzvah even at great risk to myself, and I proceed heroically to do just that, no credit can be given to me for my act. My freedom to decline pursuit of the mitzvah has almost vanished as a result of my unusual spiritual experience.

Thus, too, Israel at the foot of Sinai was engulfed in the historic theophany, they heard the voice of God directly in the great revelation of Torah. Of course, under the impress of such revelation, they accepted the Torah; they would have been insane not to. The felicitous and full confrontation with God elevates man to the highest ecstasy. But it robs from him his freedom to say No, to decline, to deny. And as long as man does not have the option of saying No, his Yes has no merit. If he does not have the alternative to deny, then his faith is no great virtue. Faith and belief and submission and renunciation are all meaningful only in the presence of the moral freedom to do just the opposite.

That, I believe, is what the Rabbis meant by the interpretation of Sinai as kafah alehem har ke'gigit -- not that God literally and physically raised a mountain over the heads of the assembled Israelites and threatened to squash them underneath, but that the very fact of God's direct revelation was so overwhelming that Israel had no choice but to accept His Torah, as if He had literally raised a mountain over their heads. The common element, in both the symbol and what it represents, is a lack of freedom to do otherwise. Since we were morally coerced and spiritually forced and psychologically compelled to accept the Torah, then the Torah lacks that binding nature which can come only from free choice. Israel had no choice at Sinai; therefore, the contract called Torah cannot be considered obligatory. Modaa rabbah le'oraita.



I suggest that just as the felicity of God's presence is coercive and curbs the freedom to disobey, so the opposite -- the tragedy of His absence -- is coercive, and denies us the freedom to obey and believe. And just as when God reveals Himself it is as if He threatened us with sham tehei kevuratkhem, making our obedience mechanical and not virtuous, so when He withdraws from us and abandons us, it requires a superhuman act of faith to believe and obey and pray and repent. We cannot be held morally responsible in full for lack of faith brought on by existential coercion.

At the end of the Biblical tokhahah, the long list of horrible dooms predicted for Israel, the climax is reached in the words: v'amar ba-yom hahu, al ki ein Elokai be'kirbi metza'uni kol ha-raot ha-eleh, and Israel shall say on that day, because God is not in the midst of me have all these evils befallen me. The commentator Seforno interprets this as the absence of God, the silluk Shechinah -- the withdrawal of the divine Presence. This silluk Shechinah will make Israel despair of prayer and repentance, and this despair will result in a further estrangement of Israel from God. Now, this kind of irreligion is not a heresy by choice, it is not a denial that issues from freedom. It is a coerced faithlessness. There are times when man is so stricken and pursued, so plagued and pilloried, that we dare not blame him for giving up his hope in God. Not everyone is a Job who can proclaim lu yikteleni ayabel lo, "Though He slay me, yet will I believe in Him."

When Elijah will come and proclaim the beginning of redemption, when the Messiah will appear and usher in the new age of universal peace and righteousness, when God will reveal Himself once again in the renewal of the institution of prophecy, at that time there will be no virtue in the return of Jews to Torah and the return of mankind to the canons of decency. For they will not have acted out of freedom, but out of moral compulsion and under spiritual duress. Similarly, we cannot really blame the victim of the concentration camp who called upon God out of his misery and received no answer, who was himself witness to the ultimate debasement of man created in the image of God. We cannot condemn him for abandoning religion, much as we would prefer that he emulate those few hardy souls who were able to survive the holocaust with their faith intact. For both the presence and the absence of God, the silluk Shechinah and the giluy Schechinah, hester panim and nesiat panim, take away my freedom from me. In one case I am forced to accept Torah; in the other -- to reject it. Under such conditions, modaa rabbah l'oraita.

However, if freedom is denied to us in both revelation and withdrawal, if there is no praise for believing in God in the time of His presence and no blame for doubting Him during His absence, if both fortune and misfortune, happiness and tragedy, are equally coercive, if in each set of circumstances our attitude to Torah is considered involuntary -- when then do we accept Torah out of freedom, and when is our loyalty praiseworthy and our kabbalat ha-torah valid?



The answer is: When God is neither present or absent; when He neither conceals nor reveals Himself; when Fortune neither smiles at us nor frowns at us -- in a word: our freedom is greatest when life is neither here nor there! For then, and only then, do we have genuine options: to accept God and Torah, or to deny them; to choose the way of life and blessing, or the way of death and evil.

And it is this situation, that of "neither here nor there," that prevailed during the Purim episode. The victory of the Jews over Haman and the frustration of his nefarious plot was a surprising triumph and showed that God had not abandoned us; but there were no overt miracles either, no clear and indisputable proof that God was present and responsible for our victory. On the one hand, Esther is the only book of the Bible in which the Name of God is not mentioned; on the other hand, the Rabbis consider the very reading of the book as Hallel, as a praise of God. That is why the Rabbis maintain that the very name "Esther" is indicative of the hiding of God, the lack of His full revelation and presence. The Megillah itself is described in the Book of Esther as divrei shalom v'emet -- "words of peace and truth." By emet, or truth, is meant the action of God directing the forces of history. Intelligent and wise people reading the Megillah, or experiencing it during that generation, know that all that has occurred is the result of the action of God "Whose seal is Truth." All these improbable events leading to the redemption of Israel were obviously the providential design of the God of Israel. But it was just as possible for one less endowed with spiritual insight to

interpret all the events as shalom, "peace" -- that is, as a result of fortuitous events helped by the stupidity of the Persian king, the arrogance of Haman, and the wisdom of Mordecai: a diplomatic exploitation of unusually happy circumstances.\* Thus, the astounding victory was natural enough; there was no supernatural intervention in the affairs of the Jews of Persia. Therefore, the Purim story was "neither here nor there." So, Jews were free, authentically free, to interpret the events of that historical episode as they wished. Hence, if -- as they did -- they turned to God and accepted the Torah, this was a genuine and binding choice: kiymu ve'kiblu. The first time, at Sinai, they accepted the Torah but without the freedom to reject it, and it therefore represented a modaa rabbah l'oraita, a protest against its obligatory nature because of the lack of freedom; but now, kiymu mah she'kiblu kevar, they confirmed in freedom what they had previously accepted out of compulsion.

This is true for our times as well, for in a sense we live in a Purim-type era. Till now, we have lived through hester panim, when God seems to have abandoned Israel and the world, and our loyalty to Him and to Torah was sustained by faith and faith alone. At Sinai, and again in the days when the Messiah will have arrived, our loyalty will be one of complete and full knowledge, being confronted by the revelation of the Almighty. In neither case, neither that of God's

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\* I am indebted for this interpretation of shelom v'emet to Zvi Zinger who developed the idea several years ago in Mahanayim.

total withdrawal, hester panim, nor His full revelation, His nesiat panim, are we endowed with true freedom. And when there is no total freedom, there man cannot be assigned either full blame or full credit.

But today we are in an intermediate stage. There is no coercion -- for God has revealed Himself nowadays more than ever before in the history of the Diaspora; yet, not in a manner that can be called coercive, for it is still possible to offer alternative, secularistic, and naturalistic interpretations. Hence, for the first time in living memory we have complete religious options. We can claim the excuse neither of God's forcible presence, nor of His tragic absence. And therefore our shemirat ha-mitzvot is a more genuinely free decision. Therefore too, we have more opportunity to reach out to others, we have something to tell them about. And most important, we have a greater moral responsibility for our own faith, our own emunah.

So that Yom Yerushalayim presents a revelation of Shalem -- not only the wholeness of the Holy City, but our own individual shelemut, our spiritual wholeness and perfection as believing Jews.

The second name of Jerusalem, according to the Rabbis, given to it after it already had the name of Shalem, was that of Yeru given to it by Abraham. This prefix which came into the name Jerusalem, stands for yirah, piety or reverence. It implies yirat shamayim, the fear of Heaven. And this has been revealed to us too in a most astounding manner.

Let me explain by referring to a most fundamental idea of

Judaism most clearly expounded by the founder of HaBaD Hasidism. R. Shneour Zalman of Ladi, in his "Tanya," maintains that every Israelite is born with ahavah tiv'it u-mesuteret, a natural and concealed love of God. In more modern language, this means that a Jew is, by dint of his cultural heritage and his very innate being, inherently and indigenously a God-fearing person, a religious man. It may be, of course, that this natural love remains concealed for all his life; even as in the jungles of Africa there may be born a mathematical genius whose great talents wither because they are never developed and expressed. The problem for Jewish ethics is, therefore, unlike that formulated by Greek philosophy. For the Hellenic philosopher, the great question was: how do you define the good? For the Jew, the problem is: how do you express the good, how do you bring it out? For the author of "Tanya," this too is an instance of hitgalut, or revelation. For revelation does not consist only of above-to-below, but also from-within-to-without. When man takes this hidden, concealed love of God and brings it into the open, when he reveals it to his consciousness, that too is revelation or hitgalut.

Such a revelation occurred in people who never would have expected it of themselves. Secularized young Sabra men and women discovered that some inner mystic force had gushed forth at a particular moment in their lives -- just one year ago today -- and, despite themselves and all their elaborate ideologies or absence of them, they learned that they are Jews in the full sense of the word. Remember

that Israeli troops captured two mountains in Jerusalem in this period: Mt. Scopus and Mt. Moriah. All logic should have dictated that those hardened paratroopers, children of secular Zionism, should have experienced a greater emotion at the capture of Mt. Scopus, where there stands the Hadassah Hospital and the Hebrew University, the shrines of modern, political, secular Zionism. Yet whereas there was rejoicing at the capture of Mt. Scopus, there were tears and the emergence of ancient sentiment and spiritual exaltation when Mt. Moriah was captured and the Western Wall was once again in Jewish hands. For there was a revelation -- a revelation of ahavah tiv'it u-mesuteret.

This tells us two things. First it lets us know that we are not alone. We Orthodox Jews sometimes get the feeling of being embattled, as if we are a minority isolated within our own people. Now we must have confidence and new courage, knowing that within every Jew there lies the spark of Godliness. Second, this same fact charges us with a new responsibility to reach out to all our fellow Jews, never to be satisfied by staying within our own four cubits and attending only to our own needs. We must assist in the process of revelation with all Jews.

Finally, Jerusalem has one more name. The prophet Isaiah called it ir ha-zeddek, the city of justice. The famous Italian Rabbi, Eliyahu Benamozegh, suggested that the name Zeddek (Just or Righteous) was probably the dynastic name for the princes of Jerusalem. In the days of Abraham, the priest of Shalem was called Malki-zeddek, and in the days of Joshua he was known as Adoni-zeddek. Furthermore,

Jeremiah referred to the last king of Jerusalem -- the King Messiah -- as Messiah Zidkenu, our Messiah of Zeddek!

Here too we have a symbol of a revelation -- a revelation of divine Zeddek, a manifestation of God's trustworthiness to do justice and righteousness and to vindicate our faith in His Zeddek.

Jerusalem has been a cynosure of all Israel since the day, some 3,015 years ago, when David moved his capital from Hebron to Jerusalem and proclaimed it forever as the seat of Israel's sovereignty and holiness. And since the destruction of the Holy City, legions of Jews have hoped and prayed, cried and dreamt, longed and yearned and, despite all difficulties, went up to it.

"Yerushalayim" -- a word that spoke magic as it rolled out of the lips of faithful Jews throughout the centuries, a word pronounced as if angels had touched their lips, and introduced the spark of divine consolation and courage into their hearts. "Yerushalayim!" Countless Jews lived and countless Jews died, confident that no matter how bitter the exile and how powerful the enemy, we shall prevail. And Zeddek will win out, and the city of yirah will once again be Shalem -- in Jewish hands!

This day, one year ago, a revelation of God's faithfulness took place, the performance of Zeddek, vindicating our ancient hopes and our ancient dreams. And, the unanimity of the United Nations notwithstanding, that return of Jerusalem to Israel is just and right and fair. It is Zeddek.



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, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember thee, if I do not go up to Jerusalem full of happiness" -- they knew that we would return, even if it would take 2400 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. For we are your children, and our deeds are your deeds; for it is your blood which courses through our veins, it is your chromosomes which form the heart of our genes. You did not forget, and therefore your right hand did not fail! For it was your right hand which was our right hand that prevailed, upheld by the "right hand of the Lord."

And on this great and holy and happy day, who can forget that divine poet whose whole life was wrapped around Jerusalem and Israel -- Yehudah Halevi. Before the giant image of his greatness and in the elongated shadow of his personality we today stand in awe and in reverence, and in ecstatic thrill and joy we cry out to him: You were right! How you sang those immortal words: libbi be'mizrah, v'anokhi be'sof maarav, "My heart is in the east, and I am in the end of the west,/ How can I taste that which I eat, and how can it be sweet to me,/ How can I pay my vows and my bonds, be'ode Tziyon be'hevel Edom v'ani be'khevel Arav, whilst Zion is in the fetters of Edom (the Christian countries) and I am chained by Arav, the Arabs!"

O sweet singer of Israel! For exactly 1900 years, Jerusalem

alternated between the yoke of Edom and the fetters of Arav -- but no more! The injustice and the shame of 19 centuries has come to an end! And how delighted we are to report that fact to you.

We have seen the vindication of your dreams. The Zeddek of Almighty God has been revealed to us. And we invite you to join in our joy.

Three forms of revelation have been vouchsafed unto us: the divine love for Jerusalem in making it once again whole, Shalem: the revelation of yirah, true Jewishness, in the hearts of all our Jewish people; and the manifestation of Zeddek in the course of our history.

With such revelations we are prepared as never before for the great revelation of mattan torah, the celebration of the giving of Torah at Sinai, the atzeret of renewal and rededication to our three great loves: the love of God, the love of Torah, and the love of Israel -- including the State of Israel, and especially the Holy City of Jerusalem.

Surely, at a time of this sort, we are entitled to true joy, to true simhah.

In the words of David (psalm 122): "I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the Lord'" -- for now that Jerusalem is ours our next mission and our next hope must be the rebuilding of the Temple. "Our feet now stand within your gates, O Jerusalem, Jerusalem that is rebuilt like a city that is compact (yahdav), all together" -- a city which unites all of Israel, and a city which is itself, once again, now and forever after -- Shalem, complete and whole.