

MY VISIT TO ISRAEL, A RE-CAP

by Ari Bussel

A Jewish person is instructed: Three times in a year shall all thy males appear before the Lord thy God in the place which he shall choose: On the Feast of the Unleavened Bread, and on the Feast of the Weeks and on the Feast of Tabernacles. (Deuteronomy XVI:16-17)

As Mrs. Itzik, Acting President of Israel stated: Most nations of the world are yet to agree with the unification of Jerusalem under Israel rule, as they refused to recognize it.

This year I spent Shavuot, Hag Matan Torah (Holiday of the Giving of the Torah) in Israel. For those who follow my articles from the last few weeks, we journeyed to Sderot, a city of 24,000 just half a mile away from the Gaza Strip, and to Karnei Shomron and to Eli, both in Samaria.

I was asked to make a presentation to the Western States Board of the Zionist Organization of America (ZOA, www.zoa.org). My comments are brought in this article. I would like to thank the ZOA Board and Mr. Harold N. Samuels, Director of Leadership/Development, for the invitation to speak to them.

I would like to offer general observations from my trip to Israel:

1. The beauty in Israel is that each one sees something different in Israel and connects differently. Yet, all find magic in her.

2. Terrorism effects on daily life are pronouncedly down (one can take a bus, there is less / more lax security checks at entrances to restaurants, one can drive in Judea and Samaria without targeted shootings)

3. Israel is thriving (tourism, free-ways, high rise developments, the malls are full at all times of the day); Israelis live in peace, except for those living in Sderot and Judea and Samaria.

4. Israel is so immersed in its daily life and its real wont of peace, that as much as it might be on the forefront of the battle with Islamists, it does not recognize the bigger WWII which some of us believe we are in.

Yom Yerushalaim

Let us embark on our journey to Jerusalem. I will start with the visit that did not happen. It is Wednesday, Day of Jerusalem. Ceremonies are scheduled throughout the day. We debate, should we go to a symposium about occupation being held at the Palestinian-owned Ambassador Hotel in East Jerusalem on this most special of days for Jerusalem? Holding the event on that day is no coincidence. Dr. Gershon Baskin and the IPCRI- Israel/Palestine Center for Research and Information (ipcri.org) organize the event.

IPCRI often uses slogans like: "Two People, Two States, One Peace" or "call for peace, two states solution, end of conflict, end of occupation."

I called to RSVP: Two reporters from the USA. The lady who answered the phone confirmed our participation, and then I asked what is the best way to go from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. Without a moment's hesitation she replied: "That depends on your political ideology." Stunned, I clarified my question: I would appreciate if you could tell me the fastest, easiest way from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem." "Well," she answered, "in the APARTHEID STATE, the road goes via OCCUPIED TERRITORIES. You prob-

ably would not want to go there."

Midday, the skies darkened, hail came down for more than 15 minutes, and a storm ensued, with pouring rain. All but one event scheduled for the afternoon were postponed as the City was flooded and traffic came to a standstill. We ended up not going to the conference. They ended up "Lighting 40

remembrance torches."

Our worse enemies are those from within, Israelis who believe Israel is an Apartheid State, that there is occupation, that Israel is the one putting obstacles for peace. They are extremely sophisticated. Like cancer, they try to penetrate the very fabric of Israeli society and eat it from within.

The Knesset

Two days before the visit that did not take place on Yom Yerushalim, I was invited to the Knesset. It was my very first visit. Two family members are long time and very respected honorees of the City of Jerusalem (יקירי ירושלים), and I was blessed to be included with a very select group of dignitaries.

We were invited to a Special Session of the Knesset, convened by Israel's Acting President, Mrs. Dalia Itzik, a Jerusalemite from birth.

In attendance were Prime Minister Ulmert, Shimon Peres who announced on that day his candidacy for President, Foreign Minister Livni, Opposition Leader Netanyahu, past Presidents, the Mayor and current and former Councilmembers of the City of Jerusalem, Tel Aviv Rabbi Lau, Chief Justice Dalia Bainish, and other notables. Noticeably absent was the Diplomatic Corps.

I bring excerpts of the speech given by Mrs. Itzik, Israel's Acting President which I translated from the Hebrew. We are grateful for the expressed permission to print given to Shalom LA Publications Group by Mrs. Itzik office.

Ten portions of beauty were bestowed on the world, nine took Jerusalem and one – the world, there is no beauty such as the beauty of Jerusalem. (Talmud Bavli)

Among the dignitary only eight ambassadors were present. Fifty nine years after the creation of the modern State of Israel, only eight ambassadors, all from African countries. The US and EU Ambassadors were instructed to boycott the event.

The magic word, Jerusalem. Jerusalem was the symbol of the historical existence of the Jewish People. Even during the periods of time when we were at the verge of extinction, we dreamed of Jerusalem. We never gave up on the fulfillment of the promise: FOR NEXT YEAR IN JERUSALEM.

The modern national Jewish movement borrowed its name from the name of the City, Zion. In our Anthem, we express the longing "to be a free people in our country, the land of Zion and Jerusalem"

There is no period in which Jerusalem has not been at the heart of a struggle or debate, religious, territorial, ideological, cultural or other. Jerusalem is not only a micro cosmos of the problems of this country, it is a micro

cosmos of the problems of the world itself.

Everything seems to be sharpened here, at this city full of extremes, overflowing with intensity. It seems that the ends of the most sensitive nerves are exposed right here.

At this festive day, we must look back and examine with honesty and truthfulness, primarily ourselves: Do we dedicate to this city everything it deserves?

We should exalt Jerusalem above our chief joys (Psalms 137:6), but do we also elevate it to the top of our priorities? Jerusalem is always on our lips, but not always at the top of our budget considerations.

Exactly here at the Knesset, we, the elected officials, are not allowed to be satisfied with breathing in this special mountain air more translucent than wine.

We, the ministers, members of the Knesset and council members have been entrusted to be the guards on the walls of Jerusalem.

Forty years passed since the Six Days War and the Unification of Jerusalem, a very short period of time in its three thousand year existence. Forty years are a blink of an eye in the very respected history of this City, and yet, so much took place here during that period of time.

In Unified Jerusalem under Israeli sovereignty Jerusalem's admirers of all religions can freely worship. Only under Israeli rule the saying "AND MY HOUSE BE CALLED A HOUSE OF PRAYER FOR ALL NATIONS" (Isaiah 56:7) becomes a reality.

As we come to summarize 40 years of a Unified Jerusalem, difficult questions must be asked:

- Did we succeed to strengthen and better connect the very detailed puzzle of Jerusalem?
- Did we know to translate our sovereignty here to a reality befitting the status of Jerusalem and for the benefit of all its residents?
- Did we pour meaning and create a reality of a truly united Jerusalem?
- How did it happen that Jerusalem has become a city in which the number of households below poverty level is the highest in Israel?
- How did Jerusalem obtain the "crown" of the poorest city in the land?

Indeed, this City has changed and continues to change its faces. Indeed, Jerusalem is large and impressive. True, Jerusalem is the proud Capital of the State of Israel.

Yes, we have a reason to be reasonably

much more difficult.

We must invest in Jerusalem, make the City a cornerstone of action, creation, development and investment. The quality potential exists here.

The strengthening of the status of the City must also be expressed in education, at the link we need to create between every girl and every boy in Israel to the City. To my regret, I meet students from around the country who never visited Jerusalem. It is even more sorrowful that there are soldiers like them. We cannot be complacent with such a phenomenon. The link of every one of us to Jerusalem is a condition to our obligation, a combined personal and national obligation, to the Capital of Israel.

In this festive day, like in all other days of the year, let us commit again: FOR ZION SAKE I WILL NOT KEEP SILENT AND FOR JERUSALEM'S SAKE I WILL NOT KEEP QUIET. (Isaiah 62:1)

Happy Jerusalem Day, Happy Holiday to you, lovers of Jerusalem, and Happy Holiday to you, Jerusalem!

Ir David

Mrs. Itzik points out that many Israeli Youth have not visited Jerusalem, even once in their lifetime. In fact, a study showed that over 50% fall in this category. To combat this trend, every soldier serving in Israel will visit Ir David in Jerusalem (a three minute walk from the Wailing Wall) at least once during the service. Ir David is expanding its outreach programs to high school students, intending to have 50,000 students visit this year, and their intention is also to have college students come, for a third time in the lifetime, to visit the Capital of Israel. (www.cityofdavid.org.il)

Tashbih Sayyed

As we reach the end of this journey to Jerusalem, I would like to end with the departure of a close friend, a very unique individual.

During my last week in Israel I learned that he was gravely sick. I landed back in Los Angeles just hours before the funeral of this friend.

I am humbled to have been asked to speak to the ZOA Western Board due to the absence of Mort Klein who, we all know, is a most eloquent orator and has an amazingly sharp mind. Just last year I suggested to include his articles in two papers—Israel Jewish Life and Muslim World Today.

On 12/30/2006 my good friend, Dr. Tashbih Sayyed, wrote back:

Dear Ari,

Thank you very much for your friendship and support. We print ZOA's Op-Eds and Press Releases regularly. Infact many a times we used Mort's op-Eds as our editorials or front page stories.

It was not too many years ago that a courageous Muslim gentleman wanted to visit Israel together with a group of Christians. His request for a visa was denied. It was only after Gen. Shimon Erem got involved that the visit was approved. A postcard from that journey, Dr. Tashbih Sayyed standing in Jerusalem, appeared alongside the obituary I wrote about Tashbih (IJL, Issue 1030).

Dr. Tashbih Sayyed, a close friend and a soldier in the fight against the Islamists - as you have observed Jerusalem, as many of us (Jews, Christians and Muslims) journeyed with you to your final resting place, may we express our hope and longing for a true peace in our lifetimes, and for a continued STRONG ISRAEL, THE JEWISH HOMELAND.