

**Seven Decades of
Torah Life in the
State of Israel
1958–1967**

Chezkie Glatt

Fellow, YU Israel Kollel



DECIDED TO BE UNDIVIDED

YERUSHALAYIM'S UNIQUE HISTORY AS THE SHARED HEART OF OUR NATION

Summer was in the air — freedom was so close he could almost feel it. My father, just a young boy at the time, dashed up the stairs of his apartment building, a loose knapsack swinging this way and that on his back, excited as could be on that warm day in early June. But even he, with the spring in his step, was not expecting the sight that met his eyes as he walked through the apartment's door. There was his mother, sitting in her usual chair, with her generally stern features shining with a remarkable glow. The normally

hard cheek bones were pulled upward into a wide grin, somehow still maintaining her composure but nearly giving in to an unrestrained joy. She pulled her cigarette from her mouth and quietly, firmly proclaimed, “Yerushalayim, Aaron. Yerushalayim is ours.” The significance of that statement, just barely expressed, was not lost on the small boy.

My grandmother, Anna Glatt a”h, was a Holocaust survivor. She experienced the worst horrors imaginable during the war years, losing 90 relatives from

her hometown and the surrounding area — including both of her parents and all five of her siblings — at the hands of the Nazis. One sister survived Auschwitz alongside her, only to die on the day of liberation. My grandmother's first request of the triumphant soldiers was a shovel with which she could give her sister a proper burial. For the rest of her life, determined as she was to reconstruct her destroyed world, my grandmother carried with her the burden of millions of murdered innocents. She was not quick to smile, let alone smile

widely. My father testified during the shivah for his mother that her grin that day was the largest grin he remembered ever seeing on her face (at least until she was past the age of eighty and was on the floor playing with her great-grandchildren, her truest revenge against the Nazis).

What was it about the recapture of Yerushalayim that so inspired my grandmother, that could shake her out of a lifelong focus on loss and a need to rebuild? I believe it was nothing short of a millenia-long focus on a yearning more enormous than that loss; but this requires further elaboration.

The Gemara, *Yoma* 12a, tells of a dispute between two Tanaim over whether or not Yerushalayim was “*nischalka l’shvatom*,” whether it was divvied up along with the rest of Eretz Yisrael as part of the portion of any specific tribe. The opinion of the Chachamim (and therefore, through the rules of psak, the likely halakhic conclusion) is indeed that it was not. However, the meaning of this enigmatic phrase, that Yerushalayim was not divvied up among the shevatim, is itself open to debate. Various approaches are suggested by the Rishonim; for our purposes in this brief essay, we will specifically highlight two.

One interpretation is found in the Baalei Tosfos.¹ Despite other potential difficulties (nearly explicit verses in Tanach included), this approach maintains that the term is to be understood as it literally reads: unlike the rest of the land, Yerushalayim was never divvied up among the shevatim. It remained the jointly owned property of the entirety of the House of Israel, in the center of which the Beis HaMikdash was built.



The famous march down to the Kotel on Shavuot of 1967. In the middle, wearing a talit, is Rabbi Yeshaya Hadari, the former rosh yeshiva of Yeshivat Hakotel. Behind him to the right is Rabbi Dovid Miller, current rosh kollel of the RIETS Israel Kollel in Jerusalem. One can see Jews of all types and colors walking together, a truly historic episode.

However, working off the *Kesef Mishnah*, *Hilchos Beis HaBechira* 2:10, the opinion of the Rambam, *Hilchos Beis HaBechira* 6:14, appears quite different and perhaps more simply in line with the pesukim in Tanach.² The Rambam seemingly understood this term to mean that although Yerushalayim had, in fact, once been apportioned to the specific tribes of Yehuda and Binyamin respectively, it nonetheless was bestowed later by these very same shevatim into the joint ownership of all of Bnei Yisrael.

Thus, according to either approach, by the time the Beis Hamikdash was constructed, Yerushalayim was in the possession of all of Klal Yisrael, different than the rest of the land and its designated territories. However, while to Tosfos, this had *always* been its status, to the Rambam, it only

attained this unique state after an act of submission on the part of Yehuda and Binyamin.

To paraphrase the Rav in his work *Halakhic Mind*, “from the halakha itself the true philosophy of Judaism will emerge.” To illustrate this point, we can gain a deeper understanding of Yerushalayim’s unique status in our collective hearts by closely examining either of these halakhic approaches.

From the perspective of Tosfos, Yerushalayim was marked from the onset as the place that Hashem had chosen to rest His Presence. Unlike the rest of the conquered regions, Yerushalayim was left unapportioned, and remained in the public sphere more so than any other location. It was noticeably different; it was predestined for the use of all of Klal

Yisrael. Any Jew living during the time prior to the building of the Beis HaMikdash would have been able to appreciate that in some way, this city was singled out for an exceptional purpose.

On the flip side, according to the Rambam, such a presumption would have been far from obvious. While indeed, according to many midrashim and even the pesukim themselves (the Akeida took place on Har HaMoriah,³ for example), the idea of Yerushalayim as a focal point of service to the Ribbono Shel Olam had ancient roots — but it was not at all clear that this would be *the* designated spot for the Beis HaMikdash and the eternal center of our relationship with Hashem. Other places in Eretz Yisrael, such as Beit El (as in fact Yeravam took advantage of for his own purposes),⁴ could have rivaled Yerushalayim as worthy locations of Divine Presence, and might have had an opportunity to be chosen as “*hamakom asher yivchar Hashem Elokeichem bo lishakein shemo sham*”⁵ — the place which Hashem will choose to dwell. It was an act of devotion on the part of the two tribes vying for leadership at a time of turmoil, respectively representing two halves of a long-splintered nation (the eternal drama of the descendants of Rachel and Leah is, in my opinion, one of the great themes underlying the whole of Jewish history), which gave birth to Hashem’s decision to select this designated capital city as His eternal abode. Yehuda might have preferred the city of Chevron, while Binyamin and Yosef’s descendants may have opted for Beit El, but ultimately, both sides were willing to put aside personal ambitions and even personal ownership to settle on Yerushalayim, a city on the border.

This decision was orchestrated by Dovid HaMelech, whose own supreme insight and selflessness ensured that all of Klal Yisrael would feel they truly had a share in the holiest of holies.

These contrasting perspectives highlight, at least for me, what marks Yerushalayim as the most extraordinary site on Earth. On the one hand, it has always been at the core of our nation’s storied past; it has always been the place where our ancestors in every generation looked in prayer and in dream, a city rich in incredibly historic events and swelling with memories of noble deeds. On the other hand, that profound sense of destined greatness is, I believe, further deepened when knowledge of the fact that this *all could have looked very different* if not for the willingness of our people to put aside bickering and squabbling to unite as one proud nation serving its Creator with passion and reverence. This needn’t have necessarily been the particular destiny of the Jewish people, but it emerged as such and forever remains so.

Our Rosh Kollel in the YU Israel Kollel, Rav Dovid Miller, has on occasion relived the scene he experienced on that Shavuot in Yerushalayim in the year 1967. Bearded Vizhnitz chassidim strode beside bare-headed secularists, all of them heading toward the makom Hamikdash, which had so recently come back into their hands. Indeed, Rav Miller discovered years later that a non-Jewish filmmaker videoed this event and upon request, provided Rav Miller with a blurry picture of his younger self walking amid the assorted throngs of “pilgrims.” They all recognized that something far greater than any individual (or even

any individual sect) had taken place, and each person who walked the crowded path to the Kotel on that marvelous day understood that they were each inspired with the same sense of veneration and awe as they made their way to the pulsating heart of a nation steadily rising out of the ashes. To serve Hashem was their common goal, in humility and with reverence for what Yerushalayim, the “*ir shechubra lah yachdav*,” had always stood for.⁶ It was what my grandmother felt in Brooklyn in the sunny, smoke-dimmed light of her small apartment decades ago; it is what we strive to remember daily as we live out our existences in the YU Israel Kollel’s campus, trying to grow in erudition and develop our character. May it be Hashem’s will that all of Klal Yisrael stand as one, petty differences put aside, serving Him in unity in the fashion He most desires, in Yerushalayim HaBenuyah, speedily in our days.

Endnotes

- 1 Tosfos, *Bava Kamma* 82b (s.v. “*V’ei Mitame B’negaim*”).
- 2 See, for example, *Yehoshua* 18:28. For a more thorough analysis of the opinion of the Rambam, please see the following shiur on YUTorah.org given by my Rebbi, Rav Bednarsh: <http://www.yutorah.org/lectures/lecture.cfm/870312/rabbi-assaf-bednarsh/who-owns-yerushalayim/>
- 3 *Bereishis* 22:2.
- 4 *Melachim I* 12:29.
- 5 *Devarim* 12:11.
- 6 See *Talmud Yerushalmi Chagigah* 3:6.