

Geulas Yisrael #151

The Six Day War and the Shabbat/Simchat Torah War

Moshe Taragin

Fifty-seven years ago, the heavens parted. Hashem created our natural world in six days. In 1967, during six supernatural days, Hashem reshaped His world, rescuing our people from the brink of extinction and restoring Yerushalayim and its Biblical precincts to Jewish sovereignty. We witnessed divine majesty as Hashem's presence was more discernable than at any point since we left Yerushalayim in shame and ignominy two thousand years ago. The heavens parted. Six days of euphoria.

Eight months ago, on the seventh day, the heavens shuttered. On a day designed for rest and spiritual repose we were savagely attacked by barbarians who desecrated our people, blasphemed the name of Hashem, and violated our Shabbat. We are still suffering that tragedy, its sadness and its frustration, as we writhe through a period of hester panim in which Hashem's presence oftentimes remains oblique. 1967 was euphoric, 2023 was heartbreaking.

It is morally insensitive and historically myopic to celebrate Yom Yerushalayim without pondering the trauma of the past eight months. How are these two moments in our history different and how are they similar? History is dynamic and in a constant state of flux. Through the lenses of 2023/4 we view 1967 differently than in past years. What are some of the lessons which October 7th 2023 offers for June, 1967?

Redemption is Complex

Our imagination tends to simplify redemption. Mesmerized by outsized but unrealistic messianic expectations, we anticipate quick and large-scale overhauls of history. We streamline the redemptive arc, naively expecting complex problems to suddenly disappear.

1967 aroused messianic expectations, which over time, have proven to be improbable. The six-day war altered the Jewish landscape both in

Israel and abroad. So much of modern Israel and the current condition of the Jewish people can be traced to 1967. It was a giant leap forward in Jewish history and a dramatic advance toward geulah.

However, full geulah is arduous and toilsome and utopia won't suddenly materialize from thin air. Admittedly, both our Nevi'im as well as our Chazal portray a spectacular and painless redemption, but only if we deserve it. So far, this model of redemption hasn't occurred. The process is more plodding than it is electrifying. The local inhabitants of our country aren't magically disappearing, and we still face bloodthirsty and barbaric enemies who deny our right to breathe. Much of the world has yet to accede to the frightening prospect of G-d's people returning to G-d's land. The road to redemption is more rocky and jagged than we imagined. 1967 aroused heightened expectations. 2023/4 sobered us to the stark reality that the landing of history will likely be choppy and turbulent.

The Luxury of Disunity

In 1967 we were still a fledgling country with a fragile economy and evolving military. Nineteen years after the formation of our state, Arab threats to "hurl the Jews into the sea" couldn't be dismissed as pure fantasy or just saber-rattling. Given the hardship of daily life in Israel and the existential threat of the war, we didn't have the luxury for disunity and social strife. Politics will always be politics, but in 1967 our population was united. Otherwise, we could not have triumphed. The War of Independence of 1948 was waged by a confederation of different armies and military forces. Its achievements were therefore limited. By contrast, 1967 was waged by one united Jewish armed force. The result was electric.

Over the past five decades, since 1967, we became a strong and self-sufficient country. Given this prosperity, we falsely assumed that we could indulge in social strife. We thought we had the "luxury" to argue and vilify other Jews who were our political opponents. October 7th reminded us how corrosive social strife is and how it can be easily manipulated by our enemies. Rabid and vicious antisemitism has

reminded us how much hatred and bigotry we still attract. We can only defeat bigotry with unity. It starts at home.

1967 launched a fifty-year interval of prosperity and success during which we gambled away our unity. 2023/4 taught us that as strong as we become, we will never have the luxury of social discord. Our enemies will never afford us this luxury. Their hatred will never cease. We cannot afford any extra venom in our system.

Historical Perspectives

Though 2023/4 reminded us that redemption won't be immediate and showcased how elusive unity is, it also provided perspective. Amidst suffering and sadness, it is sometimes difficult to maintain historical perspective and to be grateful for our accomplishments. Historical and national milestones offer us a lens through which to assess our progress. This year's Yom Yerushalayim, streamed through the darkness of our current war, enables us to better appreciate how far we have come since 1967. We are slowly inching toward the end of history, and several aspects of this war reflect that advance.

Population Growth, Extending Sovereignty

In 1967 the Jewish population of Israel numbered close to 2.5 million. Since then, that number has nearly quadrupled, and Israel has become both the epicenter of the Jewish world and the foundation of Jewish identity. Though the majority of Jewish Israel is still secular, much of the strident anti-religious sentiment has been replaced by a traditional commitment to Jewish values and to basic Jewish rituals.

We have extended Jewish sovereignty far beyond the flimsy and narrow borders of 1967. Stretching Jewish presence throughout our land fulfils divine prophecies. The goal of Greater Israel is a shared national vision both for those who pursue it aggressively and for those who take a more measured approach.

From the Margin to the Midpoint

Since 1967, Israel has also moved from the margin of history to the midpoint of modern culture. For thousands of years, we were denigrated as a sub-human race of religious infidels unworthy of membership in general society. Even though Hitler's dastardly genocide was stemmed Israel was still viewed as a negligible country. Whatever attention we attracted was due to our being positioned in the highly volatile Middle East during the height of the Cold War. For thousands of years, we were off the historical grid. In 1967 we were a blip on the radar screen of history. Since then, things have changed. We now stand at the center.

Ironically, to so many of our opponents, Israel is perceived as the manifestation of everything wrong and evil with the West. For Arabs we epitomize Western modernity, liberal culture, and the last vestige of oppressive European colonialism. In the West, for the self-loathing radical left we are a lightning rod for their collective shame regarding the perceived intergenerational sins of the West. Many of these haters aren't protesting against Israel as much as they are protesting against what they view as the past injustices of Western history and the malaise of modern society. Israel has become an effigy, the devil responsible for disillusion and disenchantment with modernity. To them, the Palestinian cause is just a side-show. To them we are a cardboard cutout of the West, a foreign implant epitomizing the evils of Modernization, Capitalism and Freedom.

What an irony! For two thousand years we were hated because we refused to join the culture, but now we epitomize the culture. Of course, nothing in Jewish history is ironic. Israel has become centered in a larger cultural war, as the world desperately tries to repair its broken identity. This ironic metamorphosis indicates that history continues to inch closer to its terminus. We are tasked with repairing religion, but also with repairing broken cultural identity. The search for identity, as it always did, runs through Yerushalayim.

A Battle over Hashem's Presence

During the early stages of our modern state, Arab opposition was driven by Nationalism. After centuries of colonial rule, this movement aimed to

unify all Arab countries by restoring lost Arab culture and heritage. The war of 1967 symbolized this dream as General Nasser of Egypt united four Arab armies (and several ancillary forces) to erase, what he saw as, the primary obstacle to pan-Arab nationalism.

Any challenge to our presence in Israel is, by definition, a religious struggle. However, in this first phase of our struggle with the Arabs it was more difficult to detect the theological element. Our enemies didn't speak in the name of religion, but in the name of Arab nationalism.

Our current enemies oppose us in the name of religion. Islamic Fundamentalists spew hatred and spill blood in the name of a G-d who doesn't exist. By distorting the basic traits we associate with G-d, by fostering a culture of death, and by desecrating the dignity of life even after death, radical Islam is demolishing the foundations of monotheism and perverting the true image of G-d. They are religious impostors, no better than atheists. Denying the ways of G-d is tantamount to denying Him.

By now it is obvious that our battle is also in defense of Hashem's presence in this world. This is not mere geopolitics or a faceoff between Western Imperialism and Arab Nationalism. It is a battle over the "image" of Hashem and over His decision to award His land to His people. This war is a chapter in the book of Jewish history about Hashem's chosen people and their enduring struggle to broadcast religious values and stand for Him in a confused and angry world.

Streaming the events of 1967 through the hardships of 2023/4 helps correct some of our mistaken assumptions. Yet, it also provides perspective, vision, and hope. We have come along way since 1967. The journey is still long but we are further down that road.