

ROSH HASHANAH 5767

In an album, from my first trip to Israel, is a slightly faded picture that I love. It shows a hillside near Kiryat Shmoneh, completely covered with red poppy flowers. If any of you ever go to Israel in the spring, the wildflowers, especially in the North, will take your breath away. This past summer on TV, I think I saw that very hillside peppered with destruction from Hezbollah rockets.

Those of you who have traveled to Israel with me may remember that after Jerusalem, my favorite city is Haifa. I'm drawn to its busy streets winding up the mountain from the blue Mediterranean Sea – a place of peaceful co-existence between Arab, Jew, Christian, and Druze. This summer I heard from a rabbi who lives there that Haifa was a ghost town, vacated by many who fled during the 34 days of war.

One of my favorite books on Israel was published in the late 1950's. It is filled with photographs that I am sure many of you have seen. They are the pictures of the early *halutzim*, Israel's pioneers, who built the first kibbutzim – in their blue and white caps, carrying hoes and shovels and joyfully making the desert bloom. This summer we saw their grandchildren carrying their guns, walking off into the hills of Lebanon, serious, resigned, showing no joy.

The Israel that is today and the Israel of my favorite memories and dreams have been driven apart by the events of July and August. The war with Hezbollah usurped more than just images of beautiful green country side and busy main streets and crowded parks, it also distanced me from the hope for a new calm for Israel, the beginnings of a mutual tolerance or better a peaceful co-existence between Arab and Jew, Palestinian and Israeli. This war has left so many of us with a distressing feeling of disconnect between the Israel that is and the Israel of our ideals.

Actually we are not the first Jews to struggle with this separation. The rabbis of old also wrestled with the gap between the Israel of their dreams and the real thing. In the Talmud they tell us that there are two Jerusalems: *Yerushalayim shel malah*, literally the Jerusalem that is above and *Yerushalayim shel matah*, literally the Jerusalem that is below. For the rabbis the 'above' Jerusalem is the Jerusalem of the world to come and the 'below' Jerusalem is the Jerusalem of this world. For me, the *Yerushalayim shel malah*, is the Jerusalem of hopes and dreams and *Yerushalayim shel matah*, is the Jerusalem we

know, with real life problems, successes, and challenges. According to the rabbis, these two Jerusalems, are placed one atop the other in spiritual cosmos – the above city hovering over the below, one looking up into the other, one yearning to become just like her neighbor. Only the rabbis could think of something so sublime and yet so baffling. As if one Jerusalem isn't *tzuris* enough, we have two of them to deal with!!

This past summer, visions of both *Yerushalayim shel malah* and *Yerushalayim shel matah* have filled my thoughts, my dreams and my nightmares. The rabbis' Midrash about these two cities is actually a metaphor for all of Israel. I live with the Israel that is real and the Israel that I dream will some day be real. Regardless of ideology, regardless of that fact that many of us here have different visions of an ideal Israel, all of us struggle with the Israel we have and the Israel we wish for. Hawk or dove, right or left, militarist or peacenik, we all live with an angst that comes from the separation between these two places.

After this summer, it seems that while the *Yerushalayim shel malah* and the *Yerushalayim shel matah* stand just across the street from one another, that street is separated by a deep and terrifying gorge – a chasm that is wider and more treacherous than it has been in the past. The chasm grew larger when Hezbollah initiated a war by killing 8 soldiers and kidnapping 2 others within the internationally accepted borders of Israel. The hole was made deeper as Hezbollah, joined by its sponsors, Iran and Syria, showed the true depth of hatred they have for Israel. They openly and fearlessly spoke of their desire to destroy our homeland, every person, every farm, every store and every kindergarten. They randomly sent rockets into Israel not aimed at military targets, but aimed at anything and everything. And the gap between the Israel that is and the ideal Israel is also dark – dark with the sadness of the loss of innocent life – both the lives of Israelis and the lives of so many innocent Lebanese.

Throughout July and August, we watched this tragedy unfold. And there is no question that the tragedy is great. There is no winner to this war. Not Hezbollah, although it continued to fight Israel's vaunted military until the cease fire. Not Israel although it wiped out much of the enemy's forces and their stock of weapons. And certainly not the people of Lebanon, a people held hostage by a terrorist organization and used mercilessly as human shields.

On August 15th, the day after the ceasefire, I held my breath. Dare I allow myself to imagine my *Yerushalayim shel malah*? Am I foolish to envision a place that might never exist? To me that ideal place of which I dream exists first and foremost as a place of peace, and that peace invites a thriving Jewish spirit, a growing Israeli culture of religion, music, art and literature. And it is a democracy steeped in the high ethics and morals of our tradition, fulfilling the prophet's call to be a light unto the nations. It is a place of ethnic and cultural diversity, of tolerance among Jews and openness to all peoples. It is colorful, happy, and filled with children. But on August 15th I wondered and worried – how will we get from here to there? How will we fill this gapping hole? Is it possible to build a bridge from the *Yerushalayim shel matah* to the *Yerushalayim shel malah*?

There have been so many times this summer that I have felt that there is little hope for the *Yerushalayim shel malah*. Not long ago I read that Achmadinajad, Iran's president, said that he would be willing to sacrifice half of the people of Iran to see Israel wiped off the face of the earth. I know Nasrallah shares his view. This is devastating to hear. How can we imagine a future for Israel when we know she is surrounded by so much senseless hatred? We all know that Hezbollah places its bunkers and weapons among the homes of Lebanese civilians. Wiping out those strongholds forces Israel to compromise the high standard of ethics that Judaism demands. It was painful to watch Israel take responsibility for the death of so many innocent people. How can we hope for that ideal Israel when our moral conduct, justified or unjustified, is diminished?

Despite all of these truths, I am here to tell you that I am still hopeful. I do believe that we will fill the great chasm that separates the Israel of today from the Israel of our dreams. I am confident that within the hearts and minds of the people of Israel and Jews around the world, we have what it takes to fill the hole or build the bridge to reach across the expanse to bring the *Yerushalayim shel matah* and the *Yerushalayim shel malah* together. My hope comes from deep inside the Jewish soul. To be Jewish is, among other things, to hope. The Hebrew word, *tikvah*, hope, sits at the core of our beings both as individuals and as a people. *Tikvah* comes from the root 'to stretch.' From there *tikvah* evolved into the concept of enduring, or waiting. There is no question that we are a people schooled in perseverance, a perseverance that is fueled by our hope. Ha-

tikvah has been our national anthem, long before we had a State. In 1948 it was chosen to remind us that it was hope that brought us Israel. Hope will be needed to endure the challenges that are inherently part of this sacred place. As we sing: “*od lo adva tikvataynu...*” We have not yet lost our hope.

And nor have I. I have hope for Israel because Israel is an amazing place filled with amazing people. Some of you may have read an article in the Washington Post this past summer about the leaders of the Israeli army who make the decisions about the strategies for fighting terrorists – be they from Hamas, or Hezbollah. In this article, we read about the process that the Israeli generals go through when making a decision about targeted attacks. Can you imagine being in this position – if Zaraqawi is eating in a restaurant that you can blow up, killing others in the process, do you? Or, if it were known that Ben Ladin was going to be praying in a certain Mosque, would we consider destroying it in order to destroy him – a man who whose terrorist assignments kills hundreds and thousands? Can you imagine being an official who has face these life and death decisions for the innocent along with the guilty?

The leaders of Israel’s Special Forces have taken a unique approach to sorting out these challenges – of course a very Jewish approach. Overwhelmed with the tremendous responsibility of these decisions, the generals reached out to a professor of philosophy to help them establish ethical guidelines for fighting terrorism. Moshe Yaalon, the military chief of staff from 2002-2005, explains that a decision to follow a certain course of actions hangs in the balance between the Talmudic principle precept: “If he comes to kill you, kill him first” and the biblical commandment: “Thou shall not kill.” He is no young man, a veteran of many wars, yet he reports “when I sign the orders to end a life, my hand trembles.” These are Israel’s leaders and this is Israel’s approach to battle. Ethics, morals, Jewish values permeate the debate. Decisions are delayed and success is risked in order to get just one more opinion about an action that includes collateral damage. Where else in the world is this type of ethical decision making happening? I hope we can say that our American military leaders struggle with their moral conscience as much as Yaalon does.

This is one of the reasons why I have hope and faith in Israel. I may not agree with the final choices of Israel military leaders, but I know that they have been made after

much thought and debate – uniquely Jewish debate. Many may disagree with the final outcome but Israel’s democracy welcomes open dialogue. To put it mildly, no such discussion takes place when Nasrallah instructs his men to send 4,000 rockets into Israel – anywhere and everywhere. And we can only imagine what happens to an Iranian who openly challenges his government.

Another place from which I draw hope is much less known. It is the year-end report of an organization called IPSA – that is Israel/Palestine Scientific Association, an organization that provides funds to scientists from Israel and the territories who are working together on projects. Here the news is both bad and good. The bad news is that the organization is having trouble raising money. The good news is that they have received more proposals than you would imagine from teams of Israeli and Palestinian scientists. Even after this summer when Israel faced attacks from Gaza and Hezbollah, I am hopeful that these kinds of instincts, the instincts that bring people together for the greater good, will ultimately prevail over the instincts of those people like Nasrallah and Achmadinajad whose only goal is death and destruction.

I have hope for Israel because the world needs Israel and the Jewish people. We have a mission, to be *ohr lagoyim* and *goy kadosh* – a light unto the nations and a holy people. We bring a unique message to the world, a message of peace, of love, of reasoned action that cannot be eradicated from this earth. We have all heard Al Qaeda’s messages – one of their goals is to blot out Israel. I believe that the world does not need another message of extermination and violence. The world needs our message of inclusiveness, tolerance, and peace.

Finally, I have hope for 4 more reasons, 4 very special Israeli friends of mine. Our family became close to theirs while we both lived briefly in London. My friends are Matan, who is 13, Einat, 11, Michal, 9 and Heela, 7. They are surely just like Israeli children whom many of you know, care and worry about. I must have hope for these 4 beautiful and bright children who go to school each morning with their lunches and their books, who play piano and soccer and video games and tease one another. I must have hope that when they go off to the army, as every Israeli does, Israel will not be at war and that their lives will be free from hatred and senseless violence. I have to have hope for them and for all of our children who are eager to make their mark on our world.

Yerushalayim shel matah and *Yerushalayim shel malah*, the Jerusalem or Israel of this world and the Israel of our hopes and dreams, the place of our ideals – they are just across the street from one another but separated by a vast chasm. And we, Jews around the world, hopeful that we can bridge these two sacred places, must take up our shovels and start to put our energy into filling the hole. Each of us here can and should be a part of this. Each of us can and should find our own way to connect to Israel. The rift is very wide and there are so many places that need our support. Some of us will choose to support political efforts. Some might give to the Israeli Philharmonic, others to the Society for the Protection of Nature or the pre-school at our partner congregation in Ra'anana. Many of us will support the UJA/Federation's Israel Emergency campaign which has now merged with the campaign of the Reform Movement. I may give as well to IPSA and to the Rabbis for Human Rights in Israel, but I will give my support. I will find the organizations and projects that resonate with my interests and beliefs and offer my help. I will also begin to plan to travel to Israel yet again. I hope that you will too.

While each member of the community must find his or her own personal and comfortable connection, doing so is not an option. It is a mitzvah, a religious obligation. Certainly the relationship between the Jews in the Diaspora and the Jews of the State of Israel has been one wherein we have made promises to each other. And, indeed, for each party in this promised relationship there has been a payback. Israel has been upheld through the sustenance, support and political savvy of the Jewish community. American Jewry has been repaid for such a promise with the sense of security we derive as Jews knowing that Israel exists. It's much more than security really. Can we even imagine Judaism without Israel? It has shaped us and enriched us in more ways than most of us are aware. Our ancestors lived on that land; our history was made there; thousands of years of connections have created visceral ties that we cannot ignore. At this season of the year, especially, we have an obligation to fulfill our promise to our homeland and its people.

Today, we are standing in spirit with our Israeli brothers and sisters in the Israel that is real looking with hope towards that place which is an ideal. After a summer of war, we accept how much work, involvement and investment, there is for each one of us, if we are to see Israel become that place of our dreams. Together we must reach for that

tikvah, that uniquely Jewish hope that has sustained our people through so many challenging times. Today, we must reaffirm our promise to help create a moral, democratic and sacred Jewish homeland.

I am hopeful that 5767 will be a blessed year - blessed for us, for our congregation, our people and its land. Let us join together as one family to help make the dream of the rabbis of old and of all of us here a reality. Let us join *Am Yisrael* as we bring the *Yerushalayim shel matah* and the *Yerushalayim shel malah* together. May the ideals of our tradition come to life in the homeland of our people and may we do our part to make this hope come true. *Od lo avda tikvataynu* – we have not lost our hope – not for peace, not for Israel, not for Jews here and everywhere.

Ken Ye'hi Razon, May it be God's will.

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