



SERMON RESOURCE FOR SHLUCHIM

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Heating the Inner Mikvah

A PROJECT OF THE SHLUCHIM OFFICE

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In loving memory of

ר' מנחם זאב בן פנחס ז"ל
Emil W. Herman

who loved and supported Torah learning.

SECOND DAY OF SHAVUOS

Heating the Inner Mikvah

Good Yom Tov! Once again, as we say in Chabad, may we all accept the Torah “b’simchah uvipnimius”—happily and internally.

It’s this time of year that the State of Israel marks the anniversary of the liberation of Jerusalem in 1967.

From 1948 to 1967, the Old City of Jerusalem had been under control of Jordan. No Jew was allowed to come to the Kotel, and obviously no Jew lived there.

But as things turned out, as everyone knows, Jordan joined the war against Israel in 1967—despite the Israeli government’s best efforts to try and influence Jordan not to join the fighting. Still, King Hussein stubbornly insisted on getting involved and attacked Israel—and so, not intending to do so and not planning to do so, Israel liberated the Old City, and the Jewish People returned to the Western Wall.

Everyone has seen the famous photo of the Israeli paratroopers crying at the Western Wall shortly after they liberated it.

But what’s interesting is that right after the liberation, there began a period in Israeli history during which many archaeological excavations were carried out in Jerusalem. As you may know, the city of Jerusalem was destroyed many times, and rebuilt many times upon the ruins of the most recent destruction.

As far back as 150 years ago, archaeologists came to Jerusalem to excavate and discover the history of the city. But throughout all the years in which Jerusalem was not under Jewish sovereignty, the Arabs did everything they could to stop archaeological excavations.

Now what was really behind their opposition to excavations? It was their fear of discoveries that would prove that Jerusalem has been the capital of the Jewish Nation for over 3,000 years.

Just as there are Holocaust deniers, so too are there “Jewish Jerusalem deniers,” especially in Europe, who deny the connection between the Jewish Nation and Jerusalem. They argue that the Tanach is a mere collection of legends that was written hundreds of years after the events it describes, and for political reasons, and has no connection to the facts. This, obviously, strengthens the Arab argument that Jerusalem belongs to them and not to the Jewish Nation.

But ever since Jerusalem has once again been under Jewish sovereignty, archaeological excavations on increasingly larger scales have been conducted—anyone who visits today’s Kotel Tunnels or the City of David can see for himself or herself the amazing things they’ve discovered there.

And as with many things, here too there are difficult dilemmas that need to be resolved.

In Jerusalem, for example, there is 4,000 years of history—and the deeper they dig, the older a period of history is discovered. If they find the Byzantine Era from 1,500 years ago in a regular dig, they’ll find structures from the Second Temple Era with a deeper dig—they even discovered an entire street from the Second Temple Era next to the Kotel.

But digging deeper sometimes requires dismantling the upper layer, which itself is an archaeological discovery. In other words, one archaeological discovery sometimes has to be sacrificed for the sake of the older and more important archaeological discovery.

And it is these decisions that directors of archaeological digs must make.

To discover a wall from the First Temple Era, something must be given up from the Second Temple Era.

So what Israel’s archaeologists finally did was expose some finds around the Kotel that were from the Byzantine Era, some from the Second Temple Era and even some from the First Temple Era.

However, there is one specific structure that they found on every dig, everywhere they dug around the Temple Mount: a mikvah.

In Jerusalem, it seems, wherever you dig, you find an ancient mikvah. It’s the structure most found in ancient Jerusalem. And the reason is simple: no one could enter the Temple perimeter without immersing in a mikvah first.

Even the Kohein Gadol, the High Priest, the holiest person in the Jewish Nation, would have to immerse in a mikvah no less than five times on the holiest day of the year, Yom Kippur.

But the mikvahs they had back then were not like the ones we have today, with hot water and as clean as a sauna. The mikvahs of back then were pits filled with cold water that stood there a whole year ‘round. So it was no great pleasure to immerse in such a mikvah. Still, because of the many mikvahs found on archaeological digs around Jerusalem, we can see that immersing was something that mattered to everyone.

Jerusalem is not just the name of a place, the name of a city. It is also the name of the Jewish Nation. In many places in the Tanach, the Jewish Nation is referred to as “Tziyon” and “Yerushalayim.”

For example, “Speak to the heart of Jerusalem and call to her” (Isaiah 40:2) refers to Knesses Yisrael, the Jewish Congregation, according to commentator Ibn Ezra.

So while we have people who are involved in digging around Jerusalem, there are also people whose work is to dig and search within the “heart” of Jerusalem—within the Jewish Nation.

Now there are many Jews who are stuck in a variety of time periods.

Some Jews still subscribe to a school of thought that goes back to the Second Temple Era. In that time, there were Jews who did not believe in the Oral Torah—they argued that they only believed in what was explicitly written in the Torah itself. However, as for what the Sages taught us by tradition, this they did not wish to accept. Eventually, these so-called Tzedukim—the Sadducees in English—faded from the stage. But there are still Jews who raise these arguments from time to time.

Then there are Jews who symbolize the First Temple Era. What symbolized that time was the Ten Lost Tribes—the fact that two thirds of the Jewish Nation was assimilated and lost among the people of the world. And even today we face a similar phenomenon, as we have many Jews who don’t know the first thing about their Jewishness.

But there is one thing we find in every Jew: a “mikvah.”

When you have a kosher mikvah, there is nothing in the world that can make it impure. It doesn’t matter who immerses in it and it doesn’t matter what you throw in it—the mikvah always remains pure, and can purify anyone who immerses in it.

The Rebbe taught us time and again that inside each Jew, there is a Jewish spark that cannot be corrupted or tainted. And it doesn’t matter if that Jew is “from the First Temple Era” or “from the Second Temple Era”—deep within there is a mikvah, and our mission is to just heat up the water a bit.

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