

YOM YERUSHALAYIM/ JERUSALEM DAY

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The guest contributor to this issue is R' Mendel Zlotnick.

Friday is Yom Yerushalayim, Jerusalem Day, the 29th anniversary of the liberation of Eastern Jerusalem by the Israel Defense Forces.

In the Mussaf prayer recited on the Shalosh Regalim, the Three Pilgrimage Festivals of Pesach, Shavu'os and Sukkos, we find the following expression: "Because of our sins, we were exiled from our land and distanced from our soil...." Why is there a repetition here - "exiled" and "distanced?" One explanation is that the term "exiled" refers to the actual physical expulsion from the land of Israel. However, the term "distanced" refers to something else entirely. One we were exiled and forced to live amongst the nations of the world, we eventually became accustomed to that way of life and in fact became quite comfortable with living in foreign lands. This had the effect of causing ourselves to become distanced from our homeland. This is very true nowadays, and it is therefore important that we do not forget the significance of the land of Israel and Jerusalem.

In Psalms, King David wrote "Halelu Avdei Hashem," "Rejoice servants of G-d." Who was King David referring to? The servants of G-d who King David was addressing his comments to were only those people who lived in the land of Israel. Only in the land of Israel can one reach true perfection in his or her service to the Almighty, rejoicing as a true servant of G-d. Conversely, our Sages tell us by the story of Purim, after the Jews were victorious over their enemies, the Jews were so respected and feared by their enemies that many Gentiles tried to convert to Judaism. Even at this pinnacle of triumph, the Jews were still considered to be "servants of King Achashverosh." Why? It was because the Jews at that time were still in exile and living amongst the nations of the world that they were called servants of Achashversoh. When the Jew lives in the Diaspora, the influence of his non-Jewish neighbors is strongly felt and has great effect on the Jew. In fact, Rabbi Yisroel Salanter said that if the nations of the world knew the effect that hearing the peal of church bells had on a Jew, they would ring them all day long.

In the tractate of Kesubos (100b), our Sages tell us that it is preferable to live in the land of Israel in a city populated mostly by gentiles than to live in the Diaspora and live in a city populated mostly by Jews. Why is this so? Surely one would think that living among his brethren would strengthen a Jew's commitment to the Torah and to performing Mitzvos! However, only in the land of Israel are we truly at home. In the Diaspora, even in a community of Jews, there is always others looking over our shoulders. In the Diaspora, we are always foreigners, strangers in the gentile's land, subject to

the strong influences of his immoral ways. However, the land of Israel and the city of Jerusalem are ours. It is our home, and it is where we belong. Even if we are surrounded by Gentiles, they are the ones out of place, not we.

The land of Israel is the holiest of all lands, and the city of Jerusalem the holiest of all places in the land of Israel. Only when we are in that environment of holiness, our homeland given to us by G-d, can we truly and fully keep the Torah and fulfill the desire of G-d. In the merit of the Torah we learn, the Mitzvos we keep, and the love and care we express towards our home land and Jerusalem, may we merit to have them returned to us soon, so we may all return home to celebrate the construction of the Third Temple, at the time of the arrival of Moshiach.

May we merit to see the teaching of the Talmud, that "all who mourn the loss of Jerusalem will merit and see it in its happiness," be fulfilled speedily, in our days.