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תשוב וירושלים עירך ברחמים תשוב - We ask Hashem in this blessing to rebuild *Yerushalayim* (Jerusalem).

Mentioning Yerushalayim is one of the pillars that uphold the Jewish people. The Gemara says that when a person davens, he should direct his heart to Eretz Yisrael, and when davening in Eretz Yisrael, one should face Jerusalem (and to the Beis HaMikdash, and within that, to the Kodesh Kodashim).

The Root of Jerusalem is Pesach

There were three times a year when we would trek to Jerusalem - by the three festivals of Pesach, Shavuos, and Sukkos. Pesach is the root of all festivals, for it was when we first left Egypt. *Targum* says that the first time we sacrificed the *korbon pesach* was in Jerusalem, so our connection to Yerushalayim in time began on Pesach.

Today we have no Beis HaMikdash, but we have the spiritual light of the *Yomim Tovim* (festivals) in its stead. On Pesach, we left Egypt, and that spiritual light is still here, for each year we must imagine that we left Egypt.

We did not just leave Egypt to go to Eretz Yisrael - it was the time when we brought the *korbon pesach* (paschal sacrifice); it was the first time that we connected to the Beis HaMikdash. This is the essence of *Chodesh Nissan*, and specifically the festival of Pesach.

Holiness In Place, Time, and Soul

There is a concept of our Sages called "World, Time and Soul,^[1] that everything exists on three planes - in place, in time, and in our own soul. With regards to reaching holiness, there is holiness in a certain place in the world, as well as in a certain time of the year, and in our own soul.

The holiest place in the world is the *Kodesh Kodashim* (Holy of Holies) that was in the *Beis HaMikdash*. The time of holiness is found in the festivals. Holiness in our soul is reached when we are in Eretz Yisrael.

Our Sages state that Hashem first created Jerusalem, then Eretz Yisrael, and the rest of the world spread out from there. Jerusalem was the first place that was created. We find this with regards to our own soul as well. The Gemara^[2] says that Adam's head was created from Eretz Yisrael, and to be more specific, from Jerusalem (and the rest of his body was taken from Bavel).

We ask Hashem in Shemoneh Esrei to rebuild the *Beis HaMikdash*. Just as there can be war on the

place that is Yerushalayim - so can there be a 'war' on the Yerushalayim in our soul.

Yerushalayim In Disgrace

The nations of Edom and Yishmael are dominating Yerushalayim today. The city of Hashem lies in disgrace. The nations dominate here and contaminate its holiness!

The place of the *Kodesh Kodashim* itself is taken over by Arabs. And now, in our soul as well, 'Edom\Esav' and 'Yishmael', which are two root forces of evil in Creation, are also dominating our *Kodesh Kodashim* within: the evil is attacking our own souls.

The Sages revealed that there are three openings to Gehinnom. One place is in the desert; another place is in the ocean, which Yonah HaNavi saw. Another opening to Gehinnom is Yerushalayim itself. Yerushalayim is the place that unifies the tribes of Yisrael together, but when it is disgraced through impurity, it becomes the opening to Gehinnom!

This is true in the physical Yerushalayim as well as in the 'Yerushalayim' in time and in soul. Esav and Yishmael are dominating Yerushalayim, and now the 'Erev Rav' is dominating the Yerushalayim in the time, by controlling it and all that surrounds it. And in our soul as well - just as the place of Yerushalayim has become disgraced - so has it become lowered in our soul.

Vacations On Pesach - A Disgrace To The Holy Time of the Year

The three festivals, and especially Pesach, is the 'Yerushalayim' of time. The 'Yerushalayim' of today's times has been lowered and disgraced from the true Yerushalayim that it is supposed to be.

It's hard to believe this, but this is the painful reality we are in, when we are in the era preceding Moshiach: people who consider themselves to fear Hashem are using advertisements to sway the world of Torah, *bnei Torah*, to take vacations on Pesach to - to where? To **Austria?!** And it says there is a *hecsher* there with *mehadrin*. They aren't advertising this to wayward people. They are advertising it to thousands of *bnei Torah*.

This is a total disgrace to our holiness. It is the time of Pesach, when we are supposed to mainly connect to the holiness of Yerushalayim, but now, the holiness of this time has been lowered and disgraced. Only the Angel of Death could devise this! Where is the holiness of the special times going?

Remembering 'Yerushalayim'...

We ask Hashem in *Shemoneh Esrei* to return Yerushalayim to us and rebuild it. One part of this request, which is the simple meaning of it, is to remember the destruction that took place here hundreds of years ago. The other part of this, which is deeper, is to remember the time of the three festivals - which are now being disgraced.

The holiness of this time, even in Eretz Yisrael, is being dominated by the forces of Esav, Yishmael, and Erev Rav. Instead of the rebuilding of Yerushalayim, a *ruach shtus* (spirit of folly) has come here. Anyone with a little *daas* is bothered by how such a thing can happen here.

Our head was created from Yerushalayim. People are basically falling from the head they were created from! The holiness of this place, this place which is the 'beginning' of all holiness, is being totally and utterly disgraced, and in the very month that is called the 'beginning' all the months.

The very place in which holiness manifests has become disgraced. We are being severed from our

own heads [on a spiritual level]. The holiness of the three festivals is being concealed, and now we face an opening to *Gehinnom*, right here in Yerushalayim. When Yerushalayim is contaminated from its holiness, it goes from being the holiest place in the world, to become an opening to *Gehinnom*.

The air of Eretz Yisrael makes you grow wise; the wise scholars of Jerusalem were regarded to be the wisest, according to our Sages. But the holiness of Jerusalem, when it is damaged, causes the greatest confusion to our minds - whether it is being destroyed in place, time, or soul.

We ask Hashem to return Jerusalem to us. This does not mean that we simply want this physical Jerusalem to be rebuilt; there are some people, *rachmana litzlan*, who erroneously think that they have already merited to see the rebuilding of Jerusalem just because they see it.

Yerushalayim: A Perfect Place - Or An Opening To Gehinnom

Yerushalayim is from the word "*yarei shaleim*", one who "fears perfection." The *Ramchal* describes this as *yiras hasheleimus* - the soul's demand for perfection.

This is what is behind our prayer to rebuild Jerusalem: that perfection be restored. The "Yerushalayim" in our soul is when a person strives to become an *adam hashaleim* (spiritually perfected). By mentioning Yerushalayim all the time - not just superficially, but to think about its real concept - that is how we can truly seek *shleimus*.

But when the holiness of Yerushalayim is being lowered, disgraced, and concealed from us, instead, the opposite of *shleimus* comes. It is not just an absence of *shleimus*. Rather, the antithesis to *shleimus* comes here. The holiness of Jerusalem is opposed by the opening to *Gehinnom*, and then all the qualities of Jerusalem fall to the Other Side of Evil and are concealed.

Our Ultimate Choice To Make

Here we come to the true choice we must make. The main thing we must choose is *yiras shomayim*, for this is our whole *bechirah* (free will); for "everything is in the hands of Heaven except for fear of Heaven." Our Rabbis wrote that in the era preceding Moshiach, the true power of *bechirah* will be revealed.

In previous generations, they didn't have to use *bechirah* as much as we have to today. They didn't face such evil like we are facing today. But now, when Yerushalayim is being disgraced and *shleimus* is concealed, the truth is very covered over from us. Things which were never done here, things which people used to be embarrassed of doing here, nowadays, it has all entered Yerushalayim.

Now comes the true test of *bechirah*. People are swaying *bnei Torah* to disgrace the holy times of the year by going to these foreign places in the world, and now we are being tested with the ultimate choice: what will we choose? Will we really choose Hashem's Will and we seek *shleimus* - or the opposite of this, *rachmana litzlan*?

The previous generations never had to use *bechirah* like we have today. Today, we are being faced with choosing between good vs. the very *worst* kinds of evil. The depth of our power of free will is if we will choose to use our free will to become a *yarei shaleim* - to seek spiritual perfection; to *long* for it.

This is our inner and real meaning of our request to rebuild "Yerushalayim". May we merit that rebuilding of "Yerushalayim" - speedily in our days. Amen.

[1] Sefer Yetzirah, III

[2][2] Sanhedrin 38a

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