

The Undivided City

By Samuel Katz

We have resumed political control of Jerusalem in its entirety after nineteen centuries of dispossession. After nineteen years of exclusion we are back in the Old City.

Our mind is still reeling from the fulfillment of a prayer offered daily by seventy past generations of Jews. The dream somehow persists even after it has become reality. It all happened so swiftly in a war we never expected. Even those of us who dared to predict the temporary character of the Jordanian occupation of Eastern Jerusalem are astounded. Even the most hard-headed men of our generation cannot but feel that here a miracle has been wrought.

- Perhaps only our children will be able to take in the full significance of what we have accomplished. For the moment we can only luxuriate in the immediate blessings of our return. No longer do we have to enter no-man's land and weave our way around the high walls erected as a protection against snipers' bullets, towards the piles of rubble, the ruins and the barbed wire left over from the war of 1948, simply for the sake of gazing upon the stretch of Old City wall by the Jaffa Gate. From ramparts, fifteen or twenty yards away, Jordanian soldiers would watch our movements. Their menacing presence only deepened the nostalgia which drove us time and again to come as close as physically possible to the Old City. The New City, in the nineteen years of partition, expanded rapidly, deeply and, too often, higgledy-piggledy into the western and southwestern hills. Life in it was full and colorful and tense, as life always has been for us in this country. Yet never far beneath the surface was our awareness that we were cut off from the fountainhead of our inspiration, from the his-

toric site of our capital. We remained as it were forever on the fringe, looking in from the outside on the real Jerusalem, the City of David.

Our generation itself became -part of the history of the city.

It helped to shape destiny in Jerusalem, forged its own new bonds with the city, lavishly shed its blood in reaffirming unity of Zion with the people.

Each of us has his own Jerusalem, his personal store of memories. As we stand among the battered buildings of the Hebrew University on Mount Scopus, looking down once again on the breathtaking sight of the whole city spread out below us, we recall a bygone battle that raged hereabouts. We were young then. Even younger was the University, this first great secular institution of learning of the Jewish national renaissance.

Many of the professors were at the time busy decrying the quest of Jewish sovereignty, urging us instead to pursue some vague unrequited ideas of peace. They themselves were happily safe from the oncoming European Holocaust: They did not endear themselves to us with their futile pacifist gestures, with their proclaimed resolve to deny their brothers in exile the salvation which alone sovereignty could bring. Yet, in retrospect, perhaps for the fruitful controversy they aroused, they are part of the warp and the woof of the city.

There were other professors in Jerusalem. Their spirit. was that of Joseph Klausner, steeped in the history of the Second Jewish Commonwealth, which he taught with a simplicity that bridged the centuries and a passion that gave reality and shape to our generation's vision of the Third Commonwealth.

Together the politically irreconcilable professors made a con-

centration of erudition that illumined our youth. We would race up of an afternoon to the University, steal into a lecture—as many non-students did—and then, in the yellow-golden light of the sunset, from a stone seat in the amphitheatre, gaze out on the wilderness of Judea, while around us surged an edifying discussion on history or politics.

Together, on Mount Scopus, through the diffusion of learning, the professors renewed the Jewish tradition of the city and raised an altar to the freedom of the human spirit. They belong to Jerusalem, and Jerusalem belongs to them, no less than do the Israel paratroopers who restored the city to the Jewish people in the incredible June days of 1967.

Jerusalem is many things. It is the indelible epic of the War of Independence. It is the handful of soldiers who, still in their clandestine formations of Haganah and Irgun Zvai Leumi until May 1948, their weapons few, their ammunition dwindling, their casualties mounting, without hope of reinforcement, fought desperately to retain a Jewish foothold in the Old City, fought till valor was crushed under sheer weight of numbers and superior fire-power.

Jerusalem is the Palmach men and women who manned the armored trucks making their intrepid way that spring from the coast to bring supplies to the beleaguered city—the boys who fought and the girls who carried ammunition and hand grenades concealed on their bodies against the threat of search and confiscation by the British sponsors of the Arab onslaught. You see to this day the husks of the trucks as they were destroyed, lying in eloquent memorial by the side of the road leading from Bab El Wad into a valley of death.

Jerusalem is the citizens of 1948 who suffering thirst and near-starvation and shelling and sniping, and—like all Israel—receiving the daily news of the decimation of their sons at the fronts, bore all with instinctive and cooperative fortitude, as though but yesterday each had heard for himself the exhortations of some Judas Maccabeus.

Jerusalem is, too, the centre of the British mandatory regime which for twenty years, slowly, purposefully tried to confine, and ultimately to strangle, our renewed urge to statehood, and at least to exclude our ancient capital from whatever sovereignty we might achieve. Jerusalem is also those young Jews who, unfailingly, at the end of the Yom Kippur fast, in defiance of British edict and of the police vigilant in its enforcement, brought a *shofar* to the Wailing Wall, blew it as prescribed by ancient Jewish custom—and paid for the honor by serving long terms of British detention.

The Jews themselves sinned against Jerusalem. The campaign to squeeze us out of the Old City, sometimes overt, sometimes devious, began soon after the British established their mandatory role in Palestine after the first World War. The Jewish community in the Old City shrank steadily, The pogrom of 1920, the riots of 1929, each brought in their train a partial exodus. The Zionist leaders offered no solution, indeed seemed unaware of the significance of the shrinkage, took no steps to reinforce the old population, rejected the idea of settling within the walls a generation of young people capable of working and defending, themselves. An effort was indeed made by the Betar Youth Organization who established one of its groups in the Jewish Quarter. They too paid a price in blood.

Today, in the Rockefeller Museum outside the western wall of the city the descriptive signs in Hebrew look much brighter and clearer than those in Arabic and Latin characters. The Hebrew was covered over for nineteen years, and was thus preserved against the wear of time. In the Old City itself the language has made its own noticeable return. Shopkeepers, pavement peddlers and urchins accost you in Hebrew, whether of remembered pre-1948 vintage or of a thinner content improvised after the Six Day War. Among the piles of brand goods displayed-groceries, beverages, cigarettes-you see many Hebrew labels. Some of the stores and cafes have added a Hebrew sign to their fronts,

More meaningful, at once grim and hopeful, are the large placards in Hebrew which have appeared at many points in what used to be the Jewish Quarter. They announce the future rebuilding of synagogues, Talmudical colleges and other institutions which existed before 1948 and are no more.

They were destroyed or desecrated during the nineteen years, The famous old synagogue of Rabbi Yehuda Hahasid, the Hurvah, around which Jewish mysticism weaved Messianic legends, was reduced to rubble. The rubble was then used to fill in the area of the synagogue. When you make your way into the ruin you stand on .a high mound of stone and sand which presumably once made up its walls. In a corner of the
ti ruin, some enterprising citizen had put up improvised walls of loose stones and, with strips of galvanized iron as a roof, had built a little stable, Dirty straw still litters its floor and the smell of dung still hangs in its air,

This destruction and desecration as well as the tearing up of

Jewish tombstones on the Mount of Olives and their use for paving and for lavatory seats, was not a heated concomitant of the hostilities of 1948. It was carried out afterwards in all coolness and deliberation, in order to stamp out as far as possible the traces of Jewish culture in the Old City. It was no less purposeful than the ploughing up of Jerusalem 'by the Emperor Hadrian in the Second Century. Odd, throughout the nineteen years no single word of protest was heard from the priests and ministers of the many Christian sects with which

the Old City abounds and which are a part of the great world Church organizations, Nor do we recall that Christian laymen, archaeologists, historians, writers or politicians ever found this destruction important enough to mention at the many forums where their voices were heard.

In that mound of rubble in the Hurvah we saw a historic pattern, Jerusalem's essence is not of stone. It is the sum of its human experience. It is primarily the sum of its Jewish experience—religious and political, The Moslems regard with reverence the Haram El Sharif. It is from there, from the mosque built precisely on the spot where the Jewish Temple once stood and therefore the place holiest to the Jewish religion, that according to Moslem legend Mahomet—mounted on .Buraq, the winged horse with a woman's face and a peacock's tail—ascended to the seventh heaven, This event established the Haram as the third holiest place in Islam, after Mecca and Medina. The Christians regard with understandable reverence and devotion the scenes where—again deriving from the place of Jerusalem in Judaism and in the Jewish State—Jesus spent the last dramatic days of his life.

respect for Moslem and Christian feelings for their Holy places should not lead us into the error of loose equation of : importance of the city of Jerusalem to Islam and Christianity with its passionate and central significance in the Jewish religion. Nor has Jerusalem any historic political significance to any people other than the Jews. The Arabs have ever treated Palestine as an appendage of Syria. When it was part of their empire the local administrative center was not at Jerusalem but at Ramle. Jerusalem was never a great Arab center like Baghdad or Damascus or Cairo. To the Jewish people alone Jerusalem been the unique, the unchanging and unchangeable national capital. It is precisely this unique, this incomparably strong association that has provoked both Moslems and Christians—when they had the power—to confine and restrict or deny Jewish access to the Old City or at least to the remnant of the Temple. When the prospect of the Jewish return became feasible in the twentieth century, a kind of collaboration grew up between Moslems and Christians. It was a Christian commission that in 1930 handed down the illuminating ruling that the Wailing Wall was Moslem property and handed down severe restrictions on the forms of Jewish ritual at Wall. The fervent concern of the world's Christian spokesman for the right of free access to the Holy Places was noticeably inaudible during the nineteen years when—contrary to even the Armistice' Agreement between Israel and Jordan—this right was denied to the Jews and even, with a few exceptions, Israeli Christians and Moslems.

The rise of the Jewish State, as well as recent ecumenical and general developments in the Catholic Church, have perhaps softened the dogma to which the Church seemed for centuries implacably wedded: that Jewish rights to nationhood and to sovereignty in Jerusalem had been cancelled by God himself. A remnant of 'the ancient jealousy no doubt played a part nevertheless in the decision of a vast majority at the United Nations to express opposition to the Israel Government's reunification of Jerusalem, now restored in its entirety as the capital the Third Jewish Commonwealth.

Israel has already given the answer to the mound of rubble of the Hurvah Synagogue, to all the desecrations, to the nineteen years of exclusion, indeed to the centuries of restriction d hatred. Neither Moslems, whose religion was born six hundreds years after the Temple was destroyed, nor the Christians, whose religion began its rise when Judea was no more, have ever before encountered the .Jews as a sovereign power

in Jerusalem. We shall now simply set them an example in tolerance. For the first time there will be complete freedom of access to the Holy Places of all religions. To us that is self-understood. We do not wish, nor do we need, to exclude and suppress and humiliate in order to prove our primacy.

Our concept is more comprehensive. We are concerned not only with the Holy Places, but with the city. In the vision of the new era opening for Jerusalem, the best minds, steeped in their history and in the ancient culture, will weave into their plans for its rehabilitation and its beautification the motifs of its predominantly Jewish significance. Within that mosaic they will find the best means of giving expression as well to the culture of Christianity and of Islam.

The planning of Jerusalem is a central objective of its Jewish Municipal Council. Within days of the liberation of the Old City the Mayor, Teddy Kollek, had given orders for the removal of all the rubble and rubbish and the other signs and symbols of its division. Today, perhaps for the first time in centuries, the walls of the city have been exposed along their whole length. A host of old and ugly structures which shut them off from view have been removed. In the neighborhood of the Wailing Wall, a large area of buildings has been eliminated, creating a great open space which, in time, should provide a worthy architectural setting for the Wall. Here in the open areas the prospect is still one of unsightly stretches of dust. This will no doubt be borne with patience while the planners discuss and, inevitably, dispute. Now the Government of Israel will cooperate, so that the work of reconstruction will enjoy the broader prospects opened up by State finance.

It is easy to exaggerate the impact of the speedy intermingling of peoples that followed the tearing down of the barriers between Eastern and Western Jerusalem. Much of it was born of sheer curiosity. Almost a generation of hatred, sown in the young Arabs, beginning in their elementary school text books, will not be eliminated overnight. Yet so much of the material of incitement was made up of demonstrable falsehoods, that the merest contact with reality must create at least doubt and, in time, reevaluation. The Arab will in time begin to make his contribution to the renewed unity of the city and to its management.

We who throughout our lifetime in Bretz Israel have forever had to see Jerusalem in a context of strife and war and division, may now—together with our joy at its restoration sense for the first time the heady odor of peace.