

Six Days and Fifty Years

Rabbi Dr. Gil Nativ

After the Six Day War the poet Haim Hefer wrote: "Twenty-year-old paratroopers carry on their backs two thousand years". I was sure that he was writing about me (though we never met) since this is exactly how I felt in the historic moments of breaking through the Lions' Gate in June 1967. The 2000 years on my back had a physical weight: I was carrying (in addition to my rifle and ammunition) on my back three boxes each containing 250 rounds of machine-gun ammunition. Though I was in good physical shape, I felt like an overloaded mule. What will I do if enemy snipers fire at us? I slowed down and a few soldiers passed me. Then a different thought struck my mind: The last time a Jewish soldier climbed up this slope was 19 centuries ago, in the revolt against the Romans. If I lag behind my company, I will not forgive myself for the next 19 centuries! I had a second wind and caught up with my company commander.

A week later, 3 days after the war ended, already wearing civilian clothes, I invited my girlfriend, Zivah, (my wife for the past 47 years) for a walk through the alleys and streets where my company had fought. We were amazed to see thousands of Israelis shopping in the Arab shops in the Old City. I wrote in my diary: "How fortunate are (artillery) shells whose explosion softened into sounds of bargaining shoppers and sellers".

Most Israelis, myself included, were not concerned in the jubilant second half of 1967 about long-range plans: Will these Arabs become citizens of Israel? Are we annexing only the Old City? Will the Arab residents of Jerusalem continue to be happy with the good business they enjoyed with Israeli conquerors-customers-employers?



In later decades we discovered that Palestinians, like most human beings "do not live on bread alone" [Deut.8:3] but have national aspirations of living in freedom. The argument that there was no Palestinian people a century ago is only an academic exercise. They became a nation in the process of struggling with us, and through awakening from the illusion that other Arab-Muslim nations would fight for them. In 1947 the United Nations said: Partition=Two independent nations side by side. We accepted this plan and they rejected it and paid a painful price for their rejection. Nowadays the world says again: Partition. If we Israelis reject this, we will pay a painful price. There is already a painful split between extremes within our people.

On 'Jerusalem Day' in recent years, during the annual reunion with the men of my battalion, I was shocked to watch a group of fanatic Jews marching while carrying Israeli flags and shouting racist slogans. The fact that there are similar fanatic groups among the Palestinians is neither an excuse nor a consolation!

I congratulate my country on its 69th anniversary that the moderate-minded center in Israeli society will rejuvenate and revitalize, reverse the trends which push toward religious and political right-wing and left wing extremes! Fifty years after the Six Day War is just the right time to separate Israelis and Palestinians, in order for each people to heal the wounds of a century of violence and bloodshed. Fifty years after the Six Day War it is high time to live up to the vision of our Sages: Jerusalem is "עיר שחבורה לה יחדיו" (Psalm 122:3) since it is a city which makes all the people of Israel friends

עיר שהיא עושה כל ישראל חברים [מדרש תהלים]

A pluralistic and tolerant Jerusalem will achieve this vision. Amen!

Rabbi Dr. Gil Nativ is the Rabbi of **Kehilat Hakerem** - the Masorti Community in Karmiel Rabbi Nativ is a third generation Israeli. He fought as a paratrooper in the Six Day War.

