

# Heavenly Jerusalem and Earthly Jerusalem

## Rabbi Arie Hasit

At 13 years old, after marking my becoming a bar mitzvah at my home synagogue of Temple Beth Sholom in Cherry Hill, NJ, I began to prepare for a "second" bar mitzvah. My family's gift to me was a trip to Israel, mostly to be spent on the beaches of Herzliya, but with a brief side-trip to Jerusalem where I would go to the Kotel and once again read from the Torah as a sign of my becoming a Jewish adult. That trip to Israel was my fourth, and the visit to Jerusalem had the same objective that it always had: in the midst of living with my secular Israeli cousins, going on hikes, and visiting museums, my family and I would visit Jerusalem for a day or so in the middle of the week in order to visit the Kotel and get our fill of holiness. At least, looking back on that trip and those that preceded it, that is all that I remember of our trips to Jerusalem. The rest of Israel for me was a real place where people lived and did all of the things that we did at home. Jerusalem, on the other hand, was a cross between a museum and a synagogue.

I was so connected to the **ירושלים של מעלה**, the heavenly Jerusalem, that I had no concept of the day to day life that existed there.

That changed for me four years later as a participant on USY Pilgrimage. Suddenly, my home base was Jerusalem, and I lost no time exploring the city, learning the bus lines, finding favorite restaurants, and discovering my own politics regarding the complex city. The Kotel played little role in that experience, and I loved the Friday night and Saturday morning davening that we did as a group in different neighborhoods and synagogues around the city. When I went off to university a year later, I kept returning to Israel, and each time I made Jerusalem my base. I discovered the charm of **ירושלים של מטה**, the earthly Jerusalem, and I could not wait to make it my home.



A few months before my college graduation, I came to Israel one last time as a tourist, seeing myself nearly as a local because of my plan to move to Jerusalem more permanently the following September. That trip, however, was different from all of my previous visits. My grandfather was turning 83, and in honor of his "second" bar mitzvah, he invited the whole family to spend a week with him in Jerusalem, culminating with an *aliyah* at the Kotel. My grandfather, coming of age during the Great Depression, could never have imagined celebrating his first bar mitzvah with a trip to Israel. Realizing what a gift he had received for his birthday, being able to come to Israel with his family, my grandfather made sure to enjoy Jerusalem on the ground--trying new restaurants, walking around the neighborhoods, making friends with everyone he met.

For my grandfather, **ירושלים של מטה** was an integral part of his Jerusalem experience, but it was not the only part. On Thursday, after nearly a week of enjoying Jerusalem for all of its this-worldliness, we gathered with my grandfather at the Kotel, joined by family from around the country crossing the religious-secular divide. As my grandfather had his *aliyah*, renewing his commitment to Judaism and Israel, I finally recognized that the heavenly Jerusalem, **ירושלים של מעלה** could reside in the same place as the every day **ירושלים של מטה**. When I next returned to Jerusalem, I knew I was ready to call the city home.

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