



RABBI DAVID STAV

JERUSALEM

One of the most fascinating phenomena in the Jewish tradition is the centrality of Jerusalem as the beating heart of the Jewish people throughout the generations. *Halakhah* established that a man or a woman who wishes to dwell in Jerusalem can compel the other spouse to do so, and if the other side refuses, this becomes grounds for divorce. The verse “If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill” has become a kind of anthem in every Jewish home. It is no coincidence that it accompanies every couple beneath the *chuppah* as they join together to establish a home. When Menachem Begin returned from the United States after the Camp David Accords, he swore by this verse that he would never betray Jerusalem.

Many have dreamed and still dream of dwelling in

Jerusalem, of all the cities of Israel, and many *olim* choose Jerusalem as their place of residence.

Against this background, the fact that Jerusalem is never explicitly mentioned in the Torah stands out. Even in places where it would be natural to mention it by name—as in the book of *Devarim*, which establishes the city in which the Temple will be built as the place where *ma'asrot* (tithes) and a portion of the consecrated offerings are eaten—it appears only by allusion. After the Torah commands the destruction of the idols and high places in the Land, it says:

But to the place that the Lord your God will choose from all your tribes, to put His name there, to His habitation shall you seek and there shall you come. And there you shall bring your burnt offerings and your sacrifices...and you shall eat there...And the place that the Lord your God will choose to cause His name to dwell there, there you shall bring...Take care for yourself, lest you offer your burnt offerings in any place that you see; but only in the place that the Lord will choose, in one of your tribes, there you shall offer your burnt offerings, and

there you shall do all that I command you (Devarim 12:5-14).

In these passages, Jerusalem is referred to as “the place that the Lord will choose,” or “there,” while the magical word “Jerusalem” is absent. Why? The Rambam in the *Guide for the Perplexed* offers three reasons. The first is political-military. It was necessary to conceal the name of the place, for if our enemies were to know the location of the chosen city, they would fight over it with much greater determination, since they would know that this place is “the purpose of the Torah”—in the Rambam’s language—and the war over it would therefore be far harder, and God wished to spare us that price.

His second reason is more practical: if our enemies knew of the eminence of the place, they would destroy it, sabotage it, or desecrate it, and G-d did not wish for such things to be done to the sacred place. The Rambam’s third reason is the most essential, and in his view also the strongest, and I quote it in his own words:

Thirdly, and chiefly, every one of the twelve tribes would desire to have this place in its borders and under its control; this would lead to divisions

and discord, such as were caused by the desire for the priesthood. Therefore, it was commanded that the Temple should not be built before the election of a king who would order its erection, and thus remove the cause of discord (Guide for the Perplexed III:45).

God knows His people and knows who He is dealing with. If the location of Jerusalem had been openly known, every tribe would have wanted it within its inheritance, and we Jews would have fought over it with everything we had. Therefore, only after there is a king in Israel whose judgment reflects the needs of all of Israel will it be possible to build the Temple by his decision, and the dispute will be removed. The Rambam's explanation is fascinating. In his view, the concealment of the location of Jerusalem—which is the purpose of the Torah—was done either out of considerations relating to the enemy from without or out of considerations relating to dispute from within. The Rambam tells us that the fear of internal dispute is far more serious than the fear of the external threat.

Moreover, the Rambam emphasizes that only a kingdom can build a Temple,

for otherwise the internal disputes would destroy even the precious and sacred place where the *Shekhinah* rests. In other words, there is no Temple without a kingdom. It is not for nothing that the Rambam established at the beginning of *Hilkhot Melakhim* that the appointment of a king precedes the building of the Temple in the order of national commandments that result from Israel's entry into the Land.

But it seems to me that there is an additional point here. Many wonder how it is that *the majority of the people celebrate Yom Ha-Atzma'ut*, while *Yom Yerushalayim* is the province of the religious-Zionist public alone. One can offer sociological and economic explanations for this, related to the absence of a public holiday on *Yom Yerushalayim* as opposed to the existence of one on *Yom Ha-Atzma'ut*. But it seems to me that this misses the essential point. Studies indicate that most of the non-religious public does not visit Jerusalem. For many young Israelis, the IDF swearing-in ceremony at the Western Wall is their first visit to the city. True, there is no beach in Jerusalem; nevertheless, how is it that so many do not visit there? The answer, regrettably,

lies in the battle of identities of Israeli society: the State of Tel Aviv versus the State of Jerusalem.

Jerusalem broadcasts sanctity, spirituality, and perhaps religiosity, and is a symbol of the traditional Jewish world throughout the generations. Set against it is Tel Aviv, branded as the city of freedom and leisure. The States of Tel Aviv and Jerusalem struggle for primacy. This struggle is destructive to both. Jerusalem is meant to be a city that connects heaven and earth—it is not a city of heaven alone. And the city of freedom should not be one disconnected from the foundational values of the Jewish tradition. In order for the public to feel that the festival of Jerusalem is the festival of the entire people, it must indeed be a city capable of containing all of them—“a city joined together,” a city that makes everyone friends. The Rambam tells us that Jerusalem was concealed in the Torah so that we might reach it through a kingdom that knows how to balance all of the positive forces in the people, and out of that, a Temple may be built.

Rabbi David Stav is the chairman of the Tzohar organization and Chief Rabbi of Shoham.