

'Guts but no common sense': Entering east Jerusalem in 1967 By DEBORAH LIPSTADT

<https://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Guts-but-no-common-sense-Entering-east-Jerusalem-in-1967-506546>

It was March 1967. I was spending the year at Hebrew University. For the long spring break I planned a visit to Greece and Turkey. Then, after too little thought, I decided that it made sense that, rather than return to Israel from Turkey, I fly to Beirut and travel from there through Damascus, Amman, and east Jerusalem. I would come "home" via the Mandelbaum Gate, the Israeli border crossing between east and west Jerusalem.

At the American embassy in Greece I obtained a clean passport, one with no "incriminating" Israeli stamps. It was a fascinating trip. Even in Damascus, I rarely felt in jeopardy as a Jew. I faced more hassles as a woman traveling alone.

The highlight was the Old City and environs. **I never imagined that in seven weeks' time I would be able to return to these places without subterfuge.** Then it came time to return. The border crossing consisted of a fifty-yard concrete expanse, once a busy street. At one end was a small structure occupied by Jordanian border police and at the other, a portion of a stone house that once belonged to the Mandelbaum family and was now occupied by Israeli border police. Flags and a flimsy divider indicated where one country ended and the other began. As I crossed over that divide, I realized I could shed the cover story I had relied on for the past week. Only then did I recognize that for the first time in my life I had been a Jew in "hiding."

In Mandelbaum House two bored border police sat behind a counter. One asked the purpose of my "visit." In Hebrew I explained that it wasn't a visit but a return. As I began to describe what I had done, the second guard ignored the tourist he had been helping and joined his colleague in peppering me with questions: where had I been, what had I seen, and how had I fared.

After about fifteen minutes, I turned to leave. As I maneuvered my luggage out the door I heard one guard, using a slightly off-color term, admiringly say (she has guts). The other quickly responded, "Aval ein lah sechel" (but she lacks common sense).

As I look back from a perspective of fifty years, I am not sure about the first attribute, but I am about the second. And I am glad for it.

"O JERUSALEM!"

-2-

reading voraciously this past while; now is the time to put aside all that we have read, to forget our political sophistication, our military knowledge, our amateur Realpolitik, our ability to follow the labyrinthian diplomatic twists and turns. Today let us try to see the forest and not only the trees.

If we will do so, we will realize that a revelation has taken place! Before our very eyes there has unfolded a miracle of a very special kind: a true giluy shekhinah, revelation of the Presence of God. How else can one explain the extraordinary events which we have witnessed? The burden of proof is now on the cynics and the agnostics. It is for them to explain what has happened from the point of view of a naturalistic philosophy and a materialistic view of history. I believe that such explanations as may be offered will be as tortured and as incredible as to make the most far-fetched doctrines of faith sound much more realistic.

Hard-boiled Israelis, even supposedly non-religious ones, have understood the religious dimension and significance of these events better than American Jews, even religious ones. Indeed, it had to be so; they were ready to, and did, give their lives, while we gave support. And, somehow, faith has closer ties to blood than to cash, no matter how plentiful, how abundant, how generous. No wonder that a radio correspondent told us over the airwaves that though he was never religious and hardly recognized his Jewishness, when he approached the kotel maaravi, the Wailing Wall, he rubbed

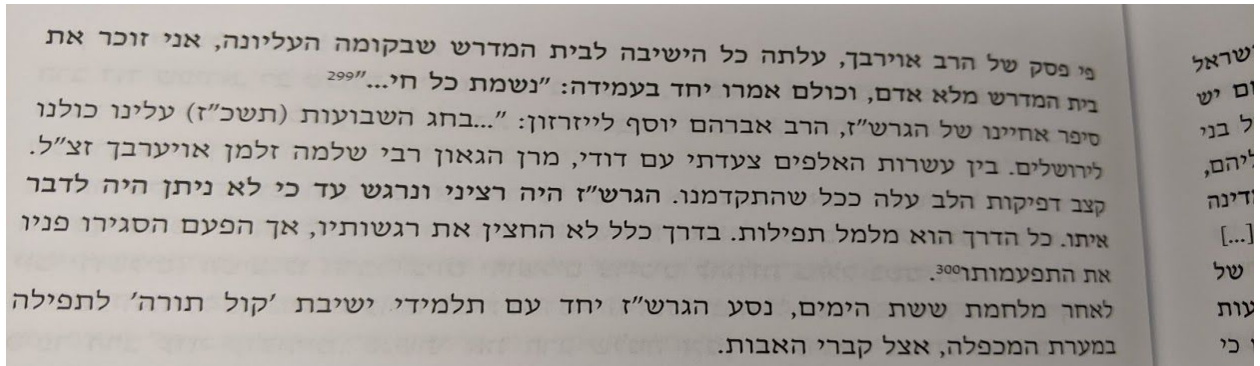
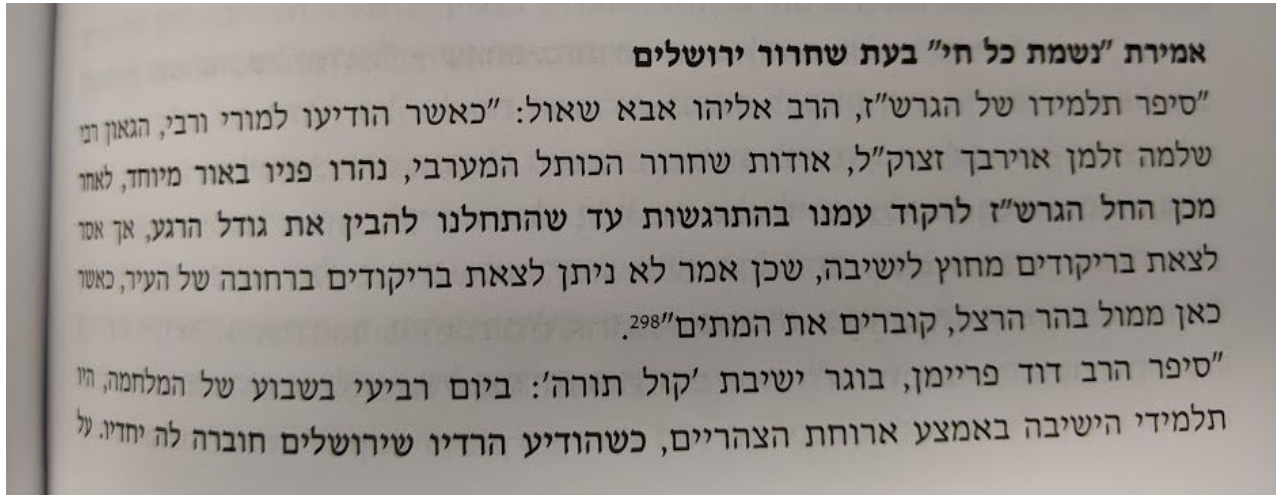
his cheek against it in affection and cried uncontrollably. A visitor, recently returned, told me that the day after the capture of the Wall, Jews who had never in their lives made a blessing stayed three hours in the hot sun in order to be able to pray in teffilin at the side of the kotel maaravi. And the press informed us today that yesterday, the first day of Shavuot, tens of thousands of Jews made the pilgrimage to the Wall. Another visitor informed me several days ago that the first, or one of the first Jews to enter the me'arat ha-makhpelah, the burial place of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs (with the exception of Rachel), in some 800 or 900 years, was General Mosheh Dayan. When he entered, he did not know exactly what to do. But instinctively he straightened up, offered a snappy salute, and said "Shalom" to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob...

Now this places a great burden upon us, greater than we realize. Even observant religious people usually possess an element of doubt within their faith. We use this doubt to excuse many of our transgressions, and we excuse the existence of this doubt by saying that had we lived in the age of the prophets or the age of miracles or the age of revelation, we would be sufficiently persuaded and convinced to be able to live according to the highest precepts of our faith, but that the absence of any such evidence justifies this seed of doubt. Were we exposed to the same wonders as was Israel of old, "and Israel saw the Egyptians dead at the shore of the sea," then we too would react as they did: "and they believed in

the Lord and in His servant Moses" (Ex.14:31).

Such was the justification we offered ourselves for our doubt and our laxity heretofore. Now, we can no longer avail ourselves of that luxury. For we have seen, as did Jews in very special moments of history, ha-yad ha-gedolah, the "great Hand of the Almighty." Through electronic eyes and ears, each of us has been a personal witness to the great miracle, the great revelation of 1967. How our parents and grandparents and theirs before them, through all the ages, would have thrilled to this singular experience -- not only because of the victory that would have given them relief from the humiliation of exile, but because this liberation of Jerusalem in our times is a vindication of their faith throughout all times. For centuries they have had to put up with an arrogant Christian church that promulgated a cruel doctrine known as "triumphalism," which declares that Christianity must be true because it has triumphed in the world, a church that condemned the Jew as a stiff-necked and obstinate deicide whose sufferings were the result of his refusal to acknowledge the truth of Christianity. The Jew, in an environment of this kind, nevertheless believed -- sometimes against his own senses; it was a faith that was often irrational, sometimes even absurd -- yet the Jew believed and hoped for the day that his faith would be vindicated against his oppressors, against history itself. That has now come to pass in our time!

For indeed the giluy shekhinah of the past two weeks is a <https://archives.yu.edu/gsd/collect/lammserm/index/assoc/HASH012a.dir/doc.pdf>



A week later, after a mishmar, shacharis k'vasikin, and Krias ha-Torah, we stepped into Rechov King George. To our amazement, the street was completely filled at 5 A.M. We walked past the old border, into what was No Man's Land. Police barricades were used for crowd control, allowing only so many people at a time to enter the narrow safe zone. Suddenly, a voice cried out and led us in song.

Somachti b'omrim li bais Hashem nailaich

It was the voice of Rav Yeshayahu Hadari, a former mashgiach ruchani in Kerem B'Yavneh, now in Yeshivat Hakotel. I have not heard the tune, almost a chant, in 25 years, but it remains seared in my memory. All the talmidim, and most of the other people in our group, joined in unison.

Omdos hayu ragleinu bish'arayich Yerushalayim

Just two months earlier, the Yeshiva's tiyul guide, Zev Vilnai, had described all the gates of the city to us from afar. We never dreamt we would be entering through them so soon. As we approached Sha'ar Yafo, the song turned into a dance. As soon as a police barricade was removed, we danced to the tune and the p'sukim until we reached the next barricade and had to pause.

Yerushalayim Hab'nuya k'ir shechuubra la yachdov

The scene was unforgettable. Jews of all persuasions danced shoulder to shoulder into the Old City. On one side of me was a man in a streimel and white stockings. On the other was a non-observant Jew with a camera. Incredibly, all barriers disappeared. I saw with my own eyes the fulfillment of Chazal's words on the pasuk we were singing – *shen'asu chaverim ze la'ze*. Through Yerushalayim, they became friends with each other.

Shesham alu sh'vatim l'hodos l'shem Hashem

We danced and sang our way down to the Kosel. Every tribe of Israel was represented in force. Some 250,000 Jews came on that day of Shavuot. One couldn't help but think of the once and future aliyah l'regel the pasuk described. As we approached the Wall, we were all overcome by a feeling of gratitude for the momentous events we were privileged to witness – *l'hodos l'shem Hashem. Sha'alu sh'lom Yerushalayim.*

We davened Musaf, a t'fila which describes the Avoda in the Bais Hamikdash and prays for its return, in the shadow of the Har Habayis. We poured out our hearts. For the first time in our lives and the lives of most people there, we were as close as one may come to the site of the Bais Hamikdash. We hoped and prayed for its imminent rebuilding – *b'nei baischa k'vatchila.* Rabbi Mordechai Willig

<https://www.yutorah.org/lectures/lecture.cfm/711146/rabbi-mordechai-willig/1967-expression-of-divine-will/>