

Echoes of Holiness

Rabbi Pinchos Lipschutz

Once again, I was granted the zechus to spend Shavuot in Eretz Yisroel, a land where holiness is not remembered but felt, where the air itself hums with ancient echoes.

When coming to Yerushalayim, you are coming to a place beyond space, to a rhythm beyond time.

Yerushalayim on any Yom Tov is a jewel alight with kedusha, but on Shavuot, it shimmers with something deeper. As the night unfolds, thousands flow like rivers through her narrow streets, drawn to the botei medrash by an inner fire, eyes wide, hearts yearning, feet quick with purpose.

By dawn, those same throngs converge upon the Kosel, seeking the moment of vosikin, as the first rays of sun bathe the wall from where the Shechinah never departed. At the moment the sun rises over Yerushalayim, the tens of thousands of people davening in dozens of minyanim of various dialects and nuschaos suddenly fall silent. There is a hush, a collective breath, as everyone begins to recite the silent Shemoneh Esrei at the same moment. And then the songs of chazoras hashatz return, followed by gorgeous renditions of Hallel, Rus, Akdamos and Musaf. As minyanim finish, their mispalelim begin streaming home to celebrate the rest of Yom Tov.

To watch it and be part of it is like participating in a celestial symphony.

Another deep zechus was to daven at Kever Rochel, the resting place of Rochel Imeinu, the mother who still cries for her children. The Vilna Gaon writes that the Shechinah resides there, and as you stand at the kever, you feel it—not as a thought, but as a presence. A gentle weight. A listening stillness.

Although Chazal say that when we sit to learn Torah the Shechinah joins us, and there are definitely many other occasions and times when the Shechinah is present, in golus the Shechinah can feel distant, like a beloved voice heard through static. But in Eretz Yisroel, that voice grows clear, close and insistent.

At the Kosel, tefillah becomes something else entirely. You slow down. You breathe the words. You don't just say them, you live them. With each syllable, your heart whispers, "Hashem is listening. I am seen."

Even in the simplest shuls, modest buildings tucked into quiet alleyways, you see it: People davening with focus, dignity, and an inner calm. No one rushing in with coffee in hand. No tallis slung casually over the shoulder. Davening isn't an obligation. It's an encounter. A sacred audience.

Life there is different. Simpler. Not easier, but purer in a way. The apartments are small, the budgets tight. But the simcha, the sense of purpose, fills the space like sunlight through narrow windows. Bnei Torah live with less, but they live with more.

And in that spirit of simplicity and greatness intertwined, one of the most moving moments of my journey was visiting the soon-to-open museum in the humble home of the Chazon Ish.

To call it fascinating would be an understatement. Using modern tools, the museum gently draws you into the past. The screen flickers to life, and suddenly you're in the shtetel of Kosovo. You hear the cluck of chickens, the creak of old wood, the voices in the bais medrash where the young Chazon Ish once learned. And then, as if aboard a dream, you find yourself seated in a train rattling through the Lithuanian countryside, heading toward history.

The life and experiences of the Chazon Ish comes alive vividly before you. You are then led into the Chazon Ish's one-room apartment where he learned and lived in Bnei Brak. There is a period bed, the same size as the one used by the great gaon. There is a nearby table where he studied until he had no more strength, where he wrote the chiddushei Torah that are studied today by lomdim around the world, where he wrote teshuvos that changed behaviors, and where he wrote letters of chizuk and hadrocha that inspire and guide until today.

There is no comparable experience in our world. To be able to stand in a room of such historical significance, to be able to look around and see exactly what it looked like when the tzaddik lived, and to be able to stand there and contemplate what transpired in that room and the amount of Torah and kedusha that was generated there is an overwhelming experience. At least it was for me.

After being given the opportunity to stand there and let your mind wander, you are brought into the adjoining room where the Chazon Ish davened along with his minyan. You can stand in the very spot where the Chazon Ish stood and offered his tefillos to Hakadosh Boruch Hu. I said a few kappitlach of Tehillim, hoping that my words might follow the same path, riding on the tefillos paved by that great talmid chochom and tzaddik.

Adjacent to the shul is the small mikvah the Chazon Ish used, which is available for use for those who wish.

Bnei Brak today is a city of Torah in full bloom, a bustling metropolis of avodah and purpose. Yet, at its core, it remains rooted in that one-room apartment at Rechov Chazon Ish 37. From those walls, waves of Torah and kedusha spread outward, generation upon generation. What a sacred undertaking it is to preserve that beginning, to recreate the space where light once entered the world.

I was privileged to be guided through that space by Rav Reuven Korlansky, who graciously hosted me and brought me to meet his mechutan, the great gaon and rosh yeshiva Rav Isamar Garbuz. His brilliance shimmered through his words, as did his warmth.

Bnei Brak is close to me. Three generations of my relatives lay buried there: my grandfather, Rav Leizer Levin; his son-in-law, Rav Chaim Dov Keller; his son, Rav Avrohom Chaim Levin; and his grandson, Rav Shmuel Yehudah Levin.

At their kevorim, I davened with the weight of gratitude and longing, asking for brocha and hatzlocha in their merit. I felt their presence, quiet and strong, their voices and memories bright and sharp in my heart.

As I walk the streets there memories come back to me from the days I would go there to see Maran Rav Shach, the Steipler, and the city's other gedolim throughout the years.

During our stay, I also visited my rabbeim, Rav Avrohom Yehoshua Soloveitchik and Rav Dovid Cohen, who provided chizuk and direction for our troubling and trying times. They were effusive and warm as they encouraged me to maintain emunah and bitachon, as we recognize that everything that is happening is being arranged by Hakadosh Boruch Hu. There is no better way to maintain equilibrium in a time when nothing that is happening seems to make any sense.

During our stay, we traveled from one end of the country to the other, from Naharia in the north, where the anteroom of Rav Dovid Abuchatzera was filled with people waiting for a brocha and for clarity, to the Gaza border in the south, which was thankfully very quiet.

It was nice to be in places I had never previously visited, such as the supposed kever of Yehudah in Yahud, Castel, Moshav Chemed, and other off-the-beaten-track locales. I wandered through towns I'd never known, their silence steeped in stories. But no matter how far we traveled, no place stirred my soul like Yerushalayim.

Yerushalayim doesn't just contain kedusha. It breathes it. Each stone tells a story, each alley whispering tefillos of centuries. She takes my breath away each time I visit all over again.

From being at the Kosel, to visiting and speaking with some of the iconic residents and characters, to walking the streets of Geulah where we stayed, there is a definite chein, a holiness wrapped in beauty.

When you meet the city's rabbonim, tzaddikim, nistorim, storekeepers, tradesmen, people on the street and even the shleppers and the taxi drivers, there's a sparkle in their eye, a touch of knowing. When you speak with them, you hear it: chochmah dipped in bitachon, humor laced with humility.

I love standing anonymously in the street, blending into the stones of the walls, and studying people as they scurry about doing their pre-Yom Tov errands. A purposeful rush takes over them, but they maintain their dignity and sense of kedusha as they engage in preparations for the various mitzvos hayom. Carrying bags of different sizes and colors, they patiently look for the best of everything with which to celebrate Shabbos and Yom Tov, as they traverse Rechov Malchei Yisroel and its little offshoots, patronizing the various shops.

Here, we hop into and out of our cars, storing our bags and stuff in the trunk, as we dart in and out of megastores filling our wagons. And there is nothing wrong with that. But it doesn't come close to the beauty and color of carrying those bags of Shabbos and Yom Tov goodies along the holy streets and bumping into legions of holy, interesting and colorful people engaging in the very same activity.

The scene is a living painting, rich in color, alive with heart.

The Kosel is a place where you can study people's faces as they encounter kedusha, some more serious about it than others. Faces are turned heavenward, eyes closed in pleading or thanksgiving. Some daven slowly, tears tracing silent paths. Others stand quietly, fingers grazing the stones, unsure of what to say, but knowing that something holy is happening.

There were the regulars, ehrliche Yidden who speak to Hashem with deep familiarity, and the visitors, with temporary yarmulkas and curious eyes, drawn by something they can't identify.

Many came with children, holding little hands, whispering words of awe. You could see it on their faces: This was not just tourism. It was an encounter.

You hoped it would linger with them.

There were special personal moments as well, such as when my dear friend, Rav Natan Feldman of Tzuf Seforim Publications, presented me with the latest sefer authored by my son, Rav Yitzchok Elchonon, hot off the press. Celebrating my mother-in-law's 90th birthday was a great highlight, as was visiting my 90-year-old uncle, Rav Berel Wein, and being presented with his latest book on anti-Semitism, which came out this week. Visiting incognito the Shuvu school in Petach Tikva where the Bais Medrash is named for my father and seeing the learning going on there and the children's angelic faces, was a special nachas.

My special friend, the tzaddik of Rechovot, Rav Zvi Shvartz, honored us with a visit on the second day of Yom Tov, along with some members of his family. He regaled us with divrei Torah and stories of how he began his kiruv revolution in that city, starting with a small shiur that he established while in kollel there, an effort that has led to thousands of baalei teshuvah over the decades. He is indomitable, exhibiting no signs of slowing down in his holy work of teaching and spreading Torah. His fire burns bright.

There were other visitors too. One came bearing flowers, but they weren't for us.

A deliveryman arrived, flushed and sweating. The beautiful bouquet was meant for someone else, ordered from Brooklyn, but the address was wrong and the phone was off. He'd been searching door to door across buildings for over an hour. As Yom Tov approached, the flowers were wilting, and so was he.

We invited him in, gave him water, and offered him a seat.

He didn't seem frum, at first glance. But when he began sharing divrei Torah, I noticed a small yarmulka resting at the back of his head. "Hashem sent me here," he said, "so I'd have someone to share Torah with."

There he stood, flowers in one hand, Torah on his lips, radiant with bitachon. He wasn't worried about finding the correct recipient. Hashem would guide him to the right address. Repeating divrei Torah about the rapidly approaching Yom Tov of Shavuot was more important. Eventually, we found the intended recipient. He continued on, but the moment lingered.

Only in Yerushalayim.

Another encounter came in a taxi. Our driver had no yarmulka, but he possessed a mouth full of maamorei Chazal.

We asked him, gently, “If you know so much Torah, why no kippah?”

He answered, “I don’t want to be a chillul Hashem. If someone cuts me off and I yell...I’d rather that they think I’m a chiloni.”

And sure enough, when another driver—an Arab woman—tried to squeeze ahead, he leapt out of the car and began yelling. “Achshav atem meivanim?” he said, turning back to us. “Now you understand?”

I wanted to give him a shmuess about how a Yid is supposed to act in all situations, but I didn’t want to get into an argument with him.

He explained that he is religious, that his children are as well, and that his grandchildren—who all have names from Tanach—go to a mamlachti dati (religious public) school. His parents live in Nachlaot in Yerushalayim and are from Kurdistan. They follow the masoret of Yehudei Kurdistan and even speak Aramaic to each other and to their children. That’s right. They speak the language of the Gemara still today. Fascinating stuff.

There are more stories I could share, like my meeting with Uri Maklev of Degel HaTorah, a devoted servant of the klal and a shliach of the gedolim. But for now, I’ll close with what happened just as I left.

Sitting on the plane, the sadness of departure filling my chest, a man approached me.

“Are you Rabbi Lipschutz?” he asked in Hebrew.

I nodded. I didn’t ask how he knew.

He introduced himself as Avraham Elkaim. “I have a gift for you,” he said. His suitcase had been slightly overweight and airport security made him remove a book. It was a biography of his grandfather, Rav Nissim Toledano. He had more copies in his other suitcase.

As an ehrliche Yid and baal bitachon, rather than complain and argue, he placed the book in his carry-on and said to himself, “Hashem wants this to end up with someone on the plane.”

He looked around, and when he saw me, he knew.

He handed me an autographed copy of this beautiful new sefer on his grandfather. The biography goes through his life, with each facet portrayed through another of the 48 kinyonim of Torah. I began

leafing through it and found it to be a compelling work on a great man. Look for it in the bookstores. It should be there soon.

Receiving the book was emblematic of the way things happen in Eretz Yisroel, and since it happened on an El Al flight, legally we were still in the land where you see and feel the hand of Hashem all the time. As the posuk states, "Eretz asher...tomid einei Hashem Elokecha bah."

And so, in that moment, I felt it again: the gentle nudge of Hashgocha, the quiet wink from Above.

Ashrei mi shezoche, fortunate are those who live in that land, who walk its streets and breathe its air. Fortunate are those who visit, who taste its sanctity. And fortunate are those who long for it, who whisper in their hearts: Ribono Shel Olam, bring us home.

May we all be reunited there soon b'vias goel tzedek bimeheirah b'yomeinu. Amein.