



## **Hands on the Kotel**

Reflection #3 of our Jerusalem at 50 commemoration series  
by Rabbi Shalom Baum

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Though I have no recollection of 1967, I have been taught by tradition and family to never take Jerusalem and our rightful access to the entire city for granted. Some of the greatest religious personalities of the last two thousand years wrote poetically and passionately about their desire to walk the holy streets of Jerusalem, yet most never did or could. Our great-grandmothers and grandfathers fantasized and cried for that which we have today: to freely embrace the sanctified city of Jerusalem. While the years, 1948-1967, were the only ones when it was prohibited for a Jew to pray at the Kotel, multiple roadblocks prevented this dream from being the reality through much of our history. I was not privileged to hear those wonderful words, “The Temple Mount is in our hands”. Yet on my hundreds of prayerful visits to the Kotel, I have appreciated the awesomeness and responsibility of living at such a gifted time in Jewish history. Whenever I go to Israel, I not only pray at the Kotel, but I spend significant time learning Torah in the Old City and visiting the many students from my synagogue who spend their gap year studying at Yeshivot on the same streets where the Jewish people were driven out of in 1948. Many of these students are forever changed from this year in the Old City and choose to continue their studies beyond the year, join Tzahal—the Israel Defense Forces—or make Aliyah. When my own daughter chose to spend a year and a half at a Yeshiva in the Old City, I thought it inevitable that she would choose to remain in Israel.

Jerusalem changes all of us.

This year, I chose to join thousands of other Jews from all over the world to spend Yom Yerushalayim, the anniversary of the reunification, in Jerusalem. I couldn't imagine being anywhere else. I will never forget praying at the Kotel on that day. It will be an inspiration for the rest of my life. On that morning, there was one unified prayer service at the Kotel. Ashkenazim, Sefardim, religious and many secular Jews all prayed as one. Everyone set aside their differences for the benefit of a unified experience, with one person leading the services and over a hundred thousand Jews answering Amen and singing together. It was a fulfillment of what the Mishna in Avot records was the practice in the Temple periods. While there was hardly physical space for everyone, no one complained. We all accepted and celebrated the benefits of being so close together, in our holiest city.