



## Mourning the Churban in a Rebuilt Jerusalem

The traditional text of *Nachem*, the additional prayer recited on Tisha B'Av afternoon at Mincha, describes Jerusalem as, “the city that is in sorrow, laid waste, scorned and desolate; that grieves for the loss of her children, that is laid waste of her dwellings, robbed of her glory, desolate without inhabitants. She sits with her head covered like a barren, childless woman...”

But today Jerusalem is not “... desolate without inhabitants.” With over half a million Jewish residents, Jerusalem is teeming with life; her skies lined with new buildings, as the city continues to grow by leaps and bounds. One cannot help but feel that we are witnessing the fruition of Zechariah’s prophecy, “Old men and women will once again sit in the streets of Jerusalem... and boys and girls will play in her streets” (Zechariah 8:4-5), before our very eyes.

Following the dramatic events of June 1967, Rav Shlomo Goren, then Chief Rabbi of the IDF, made changes to the *nusach* of *Nachem* to reflect the new reality of a unified Jerusalem, under Jewish sovereignty.

In the IDF *Siddur* he edited and published in 1970, Rav Goren wrote that the traditional liturgy is “not appropriate when Jerusalem is free and under Israel’s sovereignty.” Instead of the traditional *nusach* which is based on a text that appears in the Rosh, Rav Goren chose a text based on the Talmud Yerushalmi (Berachot 4:3; Ta’anit 2:2), and the *Siddur* of Amram Gaon and the Rambam, which limits the description of Jerusalem

to “the city that is in sorrow, laid waste, and in ruin.” The more subtle language, Rav Goren felt, better expressed the new reality of a Jerusalem in Jewish hands.

Serving as Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of the State of Israel from 1973-1983, Rav Goren attempted to formally institute the changes he made to *Nachem*, but was unsuccessful. While his changes were minor, and closer to the original text as it appears in the Talmud Yerushalmi, they were controversial, with many leading authorities at the time opposing his move.

Rav Chaim David Halevi suggested more subtle changes, changing the text from present to past tense, replacing “the city that is in sorrow,” with “the city that was in sorrow,” and “she sits with her head covered,” with “she sat with her head covered” (*Aseh Lecha Rav* 1:14).

Rav Isser Yehuda Unterman opposed changes to the text of *Nachem* because the Old City of Jerusalem was full of synagogues in various states of destruction and disrepair, while at the same time full of churches and mosques (*HaTzofeh*, 8 Av 5729, p. 2).

Rav Ovadia Yosef opposed any changes to *Nachem* for two reasons: 1) Our prayers were composed by the *Anshei Knesset HaGedola* and we do not have the authority to make any changes to the text, and 2) the traditional text of *Nachem* is relevant even today, considering the physical and spiritual degradation of Jerusalem and the Temple Mount (*Yechave Da’at* 1:43).

Rav Joseph B. Solovietchik too felt that we have no authority to make

changes to the text of *Nachem*, and the text, as is, is relevant even today. Rav Soloveitchik explained that according to the Rambam, Jerusalem shares the sanctity of the Beit HaMikdash. If the Beit HaMikdash is not standing, surely Jerusalem can be described as being “laid waste, scorned and desolate” (See the Orthodox Union’s Mesorah 7, Elul, 5752, p. 19).

Some authorities, like Rav Zvi Yehudah Kook and Rav Shaul Yisraeli, opposed making public changes to *Nachem* in the repetition of the *Amidah*, but allowed for individuals to make changes in their own silent *Amidah*.

Rav Goren himself would eventually change his mind after the euphoria of those early post-Six Day-War days faded, and gave way to a stark reality. In November 1978, Rav Goren wrote that due to the “ethical, moral, and national decline” following the Yom Kippur War, and in light of plans for land concessions to the Palestinians, he is retracting his ruling in favor of the traditional *nusach* (Terumat HaGoren, pp. 327-329).

The debate over *Nachem* reflects the very real challenge we face today, mourning the *Churban* in a rebuilt Jerusalem. May we merit to mourn properly, and see the fulfillment of the promise of our Sages: “All who mourn for Jerusalem will merit to witness her in her joy” (Ta’anit 30b).

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