

Ninth Installment

Jerusalem, Monday, August 14, 1967

The eve of Tisha B'av occurs tonight. The date is traditionally linked with the destruction of the First and Second Temples, and has always been an occasion of lamentation over past tragedies in the national and religious history of Israel. The question has arisen, now that Israel once again occupies territories equal to those it held in its Solomonic and Herodian heydays, and with Jerusalem once again its unified capital, whether there is any need for the continuation of a mourning observance. Even among some Orthodox Jewish circles, questions in this regard have been raised. However, holy days once sanctified by long observance often attain a durability and vitality that long outlast their original significance, and the meaning of this one is likely to be expanded and intensified rather than diminished. At any rate, tonight there will be a massive pilgrimage to the Western Wall of the former Herodian Temple, accentuating the unceasing flow of Israelis to visit it that commenced within hours after the phenomenal conclusion of the Six Days War. This time, however, it must be also an occasion of rejoicing and exultation. Tears may be shed, but they will be, I should think, those of thanksgiving and wonder, in addition to lamentations on past tragedies, and the term of Hallelujah, Praise God, will be as substantive as a morsel of bread with salt. The concepts of freedom of faith, dignity of humanity, and the significance of the sweep of history under the aegis of divinity must somehow or other, I imagine, permeate the atmosphere and penetrate the hearts of the celebrants. I myself dislike huge crowds and have no intention of joining the march of the throngs that will crowd the long and circuitous way around the wall of the Old City from Jaffa Gate to Zion Gate to the Dung Gate or apparently also from the opposite direction around the Wall, passing the Damascus, Herod and Golden Gates to the Dung Gate and then into the Old City proper to the Western or Wailing Wall.