



## Greenburgh Hebrew Center

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Dear Friends,

At 70, the fullness of years [*Pirke Avot* 5:21].

This is being written but a few days after we celebrated Passover and rejoiced at a Seder. While it first appeared in the tenth century prayer book of Saadia Gaon, as an optional addition to the Haggadah, one of the most beloved of the songs of the Seder is *Dayyenu*, “It Would Have Been Enough.” It praises God who delivered us from Egypt, led us through the desert, and brought us to the Land of Israel. It acknowledges promises made and promises fulfilled. We ended our Seder with the phrase “Next Year in Jerusalem!”

Historically, Israel and Jerusalem have been central to Jewish identity. In one potent image, Jerusalem is seen as *umbilicus mundi*, the world’s navel, from which and through which spiritual nourishment travels throughout the world. Medieval mapmakers often used this image as they portrayed the world of their creation and understanding.

For countless generations, throughout periods of exile and dispersion, Jerusalem and Israel remained central to the consciousness and psyche of the Jewish people. “Next year in Jerusalem!” was no idle statement at the conclusion of Yom Kippur or the Seder celebration. How sadly ironic that we who were born just before and just after the reestablishment of a third Jewish commonwealth in Israel seem more distanced than ever from that which focused and centered us through hundreds of years, when access to the land and its residents was prohibited.

In the summer of 1967, just after the Six Day War, Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote:

The Lord of history has always placed us in predicaments, and this seems to be a part of our destiny, never to relax in complacency, but to face difficult tasks, to live by the challenge. In this world there is no gem, which is not in need of refinement, no wheat without chaff, no vineyard without weeds, no roses without thorns. Light and shadow are mingled. There is a need of refining, rethinking. The joy and exaltation that come from Israel reborn are mixed with pain and chagrin over the suffering and bitterness that are found in the Middle East today.

There is the *dvash* and the *oketz*, the honey and the sting. As we celebrate the 70th anniversary of Israel’s independence, many continue to be concerned, troubled, and challenged. Just how can we work for its future and help to assure the fulfillment of God’s expectations in the land of promise? And yet, Heschel reminds us,

The ultimate meaning of the State of Israel must be seen in terms of the visions of the prophets: the redemption of all men. The religious duty of the Jew is to participate in the process of continuous redemption, in seeing that justice prevails over power, that awareness of God penetrates human understanding. Jacob did not ascend the ladder but he had a vision of it. Daily a voice demands that we ascend, that we rise. Most of the time we seek the ladder and cannot find it, but there is no choice—we must cherish the vision and seek the ladder...There are no easy roads, there is no simple advice...The way of Israel is a way of rising to the peak of the mountain....The vision of reaching the peak gives meaning to our touching its border.

We rejoice and we aspire.

B’ididut,

*Barry*

Barry A. Kenter

Rabbi Emeritus

A vibrant egalitarian Conservative Jewish community in Westchester County,  
embracing our traditions while actively participating in our changing world.