

# Jerusalem: As seen through eyes of Mobile rabbi

"Every Jew who seeks his identity ultimately finds his spiritual roots in Jerusalem, no matter where he was born or where he lives," according to a Mobile rabbi.

**RABBI STANLEY Gerstein**, spiritual leader of Dauphin Street Synagogue, made the comment during an address at the latest session of the Mobile Area Jewish-Christian Dialogue.

Said Gerstein, "Our synagogues are supposed to face Jerusalem. Our prayers are directed toward Jerusalem. Our hearts, our souls, our very existence — all are bound to Jerusalem with the bonds of eternal love."

"We repeatedly pledge in our prayers never to forget Jerusalem, no matter what the cost, for Jewish life is incomprehensible — even inconceivable — without Jerusalem."

**GERSTEIN SAID**, "We are being taught today by Jerusalem herself. Our visions and our dreams are being renewed and challenged as Jerusalem is freeing herself, with God's help, to renew his revelation."

He added, "The way this is happening may be understood in terms of polar opposites."

**ONE POLAR** opposite, he said, "pits the inclusive Jerusalem against the exclusive Jerusalem."

Elaborating, he said, "The Jewish people wanted a sovereign inclusive Jerusalem. The proposal of the 1947 United Nations partition plan (of Jerusalem) was a setback to the inclusive Jerusalem because an internationally administered city would have perpetuated certain elements of exclusive control."

"So the 1947 UN proposal was accepted as compromise by Jewish leaders only because they felt that the partition plan as a whole was the only pragmatic way of achieving a Jewish state."

"They accepted the plan with serious internal reservations, but they accepted it. The Arabs rejected it."

"Owing to the results of the fighting, however, Jerusalem lived for 22 years in circumstances in which her inclusive and exclusive natures were ranged side by side."

"On the one hand in the western part of the city was the inclusive Jerusalem striving toward an indigenous pluralism suitable to a Middle Eastern context in which the rights and prerogatives of all groups were scrupulously affirmed."

"On the other hand, across the border was a situation in which the dominant religious persuasion, Islam, prevented any expression of Judaism, closing off access to shrines, destroying synagogues, desecrating burial grounds and the like."

"This was not destined to last, however, for in 1967 the city was reunited and inclusive Jerusalem was predominant."

"That this new era in which Jews, Christians and Moslems will have authentic pluralism — is bound to last is not a foregone conclusion."

"The forces of reaction and exclusivity are demonstrating new vigor in the Middle East today. From Tehran to Libya, a reborn Islam is on the march. Their mentality is particularly virulent in the ideology of the Palestine Liberation Organization."

At present, however, said the speaker, "this new inclusive Jerusalem survives and flourishes to teach the world that cooperation among all the peoples of the Middle East in a framework of democratic self-expression is absolutely necessary."

**THE RABBI** described a second set of polar opposites as "the actual Jerusalem over the artificial Jerusalem."

Politically, he said, Israel's claim to Jerusalem is as defensible as the land arrangements reached in Europe and Asia after World War II.

"The actual vs artificial dichotomy also plays itself out in the realm of theology. There is a construct of Jerusalem that exists in many Christian minds, a picture more or less accurate of a first-century city that provided a matrix for Christian origins — but rarely associated with or interacted with the Jerusalem that is."

"To this construct many Christians have attached criteria that have made it a reflection of their particular theologies, their ideal of 'the Kingdom,' replete with visions purporting to transcend the vagaries of space and time."

"This ideal kingdom of Jerusalem is dysfunctional to the actual Jerusalem because it eliminates elements of the land and peoplehood so central to Jewish understanding."

**A THIRD POLARITY**, according to the speaker, is "a tension between the substantial Jerusalem and the mythological Jerusalem."

"In the Christian heritage there is the view of the 'heavenly Jerusalem.' The apocalyptic hope and the mystical experience of the coming of the messiah foster visions built around Jerusalem. However, these visions of the latter days can be disconcerting to realists."

Said Gerstein, "To this mythological Jerusalem of certain of today's prophets and visionaries, the substantial Jerusalem replies: 'I am also the Jerusalem of supermarkets and solar heat, of dodgers and codgers, of sewage, public health, intergroup relations, water supply and housing problems.'"

"The Jerusalem of the future must not be allowed to cancel out the Jerusalem that is."

**A FOURTH POLARITY**, said Gerstein, involves "Jerusalem the true and Jerusalem the false."

He said, Jerusalem the true stands implacably connecting heaven with earth, calling Christians and Moslems to recognize that we cannot afford fraternal strife with the Jewish people when faced with powers that long to eliminate us all.

Gerstein said Jerusalem has been destroyed 17 times in its history and yet never erased.

**TODAY'S JERUSALEM** "is a living testimony which carries the quintessence of that complex amalgam of people which is Israel — land, book and state."

"It will always be, and will always lead the world in spiritual resistance against the mad Caesars of death."



(Mobile Press Register photo by Ron Wheeler)

**Rabbi Stanley Gerstein**