

# Yerushalayim Yearnings:

## Walking Chizkiyahu's Tunnels: Confessions and Reflections of an Almost Pachdan

Shalom U'vracha from Yerushalayim Ir HaKodesh.

We appreciate all the LINK vibrancy from afar and welcome Rebecca (Kandel) and Ariel Berkowitz back to Los Angeles from Dallas, Texas. May it be with great hatzlacha!

Many years ago, the much younger Branders walked what is colloquially known as the Chizkiyahu's water tunnel. Decked out in lanterns and headlights, our young children traversed the 533 meter route that directs the Gichon Springs from the east edge of Jerusalem into the Silwan pool to the west. This tunnel likely contains great historical and hashkafic significance (IyH for a different letter). It is also one of the great discoveries of modern archaeology attributed to a truant child in the 1880's who wanting to have a good time, stumbled upon an ancient inscription – confirming the well known adage never let school get in the way of your education. The rest as they say is (a rediscovering of ancient) history.

Fast forward approximately 25 years later; my wife and I tour Ir David this Wednesday. If you are looking for a fun time, *Ir David* is probably not the place. In the summer, it is hot and hotter – but for the Jew it is Disneyland - the happiest place on earth. A place where David Hamelech likely penned many of his Tehillim and bespoke the famous words (Tehillim 125) *just as the mountains surround Yerushalayim, (yerushalayim harim saviv lah), so does Hashem surround (protect) his people now and forever.*

Our tour group consists of an older charedi couple, a middle aged Ethiopian couple, and several Israeli families with a wide ranging spectrum of religiosity. We are the token Americans; befitting as we are on the hebrew tour. One thing unites the group – it is Yerushalayim – the *ir shechubra la yachdav* (Tehillim 122) – the city that makes all Jews friends.

The tour commences: We are perched on a high point, to the southeast of the Old



City. Our tour guide describes the conquest and the purchase of Yerushalayim by David HaMelech from the Yevusim (Shmuel 2, 5:4-8). Underneath, to the east, is Nachal Kidron, of *parah adumah* fame. Across the valley is Silwan (Shiloach for the Jews), an Arab neighborhood, and Har Hazeisim (or Har HaMishcha) of Mishna and Tanach fame. Apparently, it is the oldest active cemetery in the world (we see many buses and probably a hillula). To our east we see Har Tziyon. Yericho is in the distance. To our north, we see the makom hamikdash. This is prime Jewish real estate (the real Beverly Hills). It is here where Avraham Avinu and Yirmiyahu and David HaMelech and millions of Jews walked - and walk.

Ir David is also one of the great archaeological sites of Modern/Ancient Israel. Our tour guide scoffs at the modern 500 year old Ottoman Turk walls surrounding the contemporary *Old City* of Jerusalem. In stark contrast to 75 year old L.A. historical landmarks, Jerusalem archaeology can't vie for anything serious until a millennia or two have passed.

We descend a few stories down. Eilat Mazar, a famed archaeologist, has discovered important homes buried under the rubble ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Large\\_Stone\\_Structure](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Large_Stone_Structure)). She claims (with serious basis) that this is the palace of David HaMelech. Incredibly, bullae (clay seals) with the names *Yehuchal ben Shalmyah* and *Gemaryahu ben Shafan* of Sefer Yirmiyahu (chapters 38 & 36) fame have recently been discovered. The latter is the sofer who implores Yehoyakim, the penultimate king before the Churban who is *so not happy with what he hears*, to not destroy Yirmiyahu's prophetic scroll of doom, whereupon Yehoyakim rips it up and throws it into the fire.

Our passionate tour guide Avishag, depicts the possible scene of the archaeologist, Yigal Shiloh, who finds those treasures. He comes home every day, while his wife bemoans his soot and ash-filled clothing, wondering what's it all worth – until he shares his discovery and proclaims: *Yes it is dirty, but I am enwrapped in the ash of churban bayis rishon!*

As we recite Lecha Dodi this Friday night consider the beauty of a nation that weekly prods herself with the navi's words to Klal Yisrael - *hisnaari mefar kumi. Get up from the ashes, wear you glorious garments*. Indeed a nation that rolls in its holy ash is destined to awaken!



We descend very far down to the very source of the water the Gichon spring. Here, Shlomo is coronated (Melachim 1)! In this low humble spot (perhaps named after the word *gachon* belly), Jewish History reaches a very high point. It is also where the water for Sukkos nisuch hamayim and parah adumah is drawn from. Wow!

A favorite expression of the Branders (and I imagine many seeking to meet in the rova) is *meet me at the menorah*. That Menorah is in the middle of the square and is a very easy recognizable spot. From there, we guide our guests to the nook and crannies of the Jewish Quarter.

I enjoy the irony – but pine for the near future where the menorah becomes a destination, not a marker. That menorah is the attempt of venerated talmidei chachamim from Machon Hamikdash who yearn for a future. It costs a heavy hunk of change (45 Kilo of 24 karat gold). The developers likely hold like the Rambam that we will build the bayis shlishi even when Moshiach comes, so let's get it done now, so we can get going right away. (akin to the Chofetz Chaim's exhortation that it's time to learn kodshim – (a practice that is now de riguer in Brisk like yeshivos) because we have to be ready. Indeed on Thursday night, I am fortunate to be at a siyum on Zevachim made by about 60 Avreichim of the Zilberman Kollel, who have studied for a few years in great depth and proficiency the laws of the past and the future - Beis Hamikdash and korbanos.

Our short tour of Ir David and meeting at the menorah is not simply to unravel the past glory – it is a subconscious expression of *v'hasheiv es haavodah ldvir beisecha*. Hashem, we are not interested in archaeological conjecture – we delve into the past to connect to a deeper future. We want Jews out of tunnels. We want clarity to understanding suffering. We want the serenity of the future. We want YOU!

Which brings us back to the water tunnel. That 533 meter snaking tunnel carries with it some discomfort; a faint recollection of the past about being stuck underground in dark and thin passageways with waist high water and three little children did not make me relish the return. Batyah gently pushed me and I hemmed. Until the end, I was noncommittal. Authentically.



And then a 7 year old somewhat *chutzpadik* kid gleefully waits for the climax of his tour. He joyously proclaimed *mi shepachdan nichnas bayaveish* – only the cowards choose the dry (alternate 5 minute ancient Canaanite) route out. Well, the Talmud says that prophecy is for the fools and the minors. I might be afraid (adjective), but I was not going to be a terminal *pachdan* (noun) – not to him and not to me.

The deal is sealed. Single file, Batyah and I walk in. The water is high-ish and manageable and the dark is not so bad with those newfangled (less than 500 year old) cellphones. As we pleasantly retrace the footsteps of Jewish History (with the 64 year old Charedi fellow leading) humming, *v'haikar lo lephacheid klal*, I roll away some ash from a long time ago. We emerge tired, jubilant and redeemed. Transcendent in a very small way.

We had the great privilege of seeing the Blums, look forward to spending Shabbos with the Chizkiyas in the Old City seeing the Spolins and IyH others next week.

Mazel Tov to talmidi ahuv Michael and Ariella Novack on their son's Yisrael Hirschel (aka Henry's) bar mitzvah this Shabbos. We are so excited for his wonderful future in Klal Yisrael.

LINK has a very important ongoing renovations project to house our Avreichim. It is cost effective and costly at the same time. If you are interested, please reach out to Rabbi Lebhar or myself. We need your participation.

A gutten Shabbos to all.

B'yedidus azah  
The Branders