



THE BLOGS

## Yochi Rappeport

# A home is more than four walls



Hanna Taieb photography

We are approaching the Ninth of Av, the marking of the Temple's destruction. One of the biggest *halakhic* dilemmas in recent years is the question: is there still a need to fast on the Ninth of Av? Indeed, the mourning observed is over a

desolate Jerusalem, and today we see a vibrant city. And if one insists that still, the absence of the Temple still remains, why not compromise and fast for half a day, seeing as redemption is partially in our hands?

Except the Temple that was twice destroyed was only a physical house; but it takes more than four walls to make a home. The values, the love, loyalty and closeness – “over these I cry,” and over these we still mourn. That we lost the most precious of all – respect and compassion for one another.

In Tractate Taanit it is written “*the Blessed One said: ‘I will not come to Jerusalem above until I come to Jerusalem below.’*” God already resides “above,” but if we desire to be elevated to a higher level as well, it is on the Divine to transfer us there, by way of “Jerusalem below.”

It is impossible to climb up a ladder with missing rungs. Our mission is to create that which appears unreachable, a “middle-ground Jerusalem,” a place where heaven and earth come into contact. A place where all sides can meet and begin to listen.

In his “end of days” vision, the prophet Isaiah foresees “*the wolf and the lamb will live together, and the leopard and goat will rest together.*” Some assume these verses predict a fundamental change in nature upon messianic times; however, these images perhaps suggest a gentler message through metaphor, envisioning a time when opposing sides will agree to sit respectfully with one another. The buds of redemption began with the LGBTQ community’s brave activism, and in particular, the efforts of Orthodox rabbis to join in meaningful, humane conversation and express loving solidarity. The era of redemption is not meant to be one of conformity or uniformity; rather, redemption emerges through the respectful recognition of differences, and a commitment to seeing the “other” as an equal.

Just as Jerusalem reveals treasures behind each stone wall and hidden pathway, so too I believe there is great power specifically in the discovery of this richer diversity, and it strengthens the Jewish People. Only through true encounter with the “other,” through deep acceptance, can we arrive at Isaiah’s vision, and to a fully rebuilt Jerusalem.

“From Zion Torah shall be transmitted” – the question is, what sort of Torah? A Torah of hate, or one that teaches love and respect for all? I choose the latter option, and I welcome you to join me.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Yochi Rapoport is the executive director of Women of the Wall. She was born and raised in the Orthodox environment of the Safed Old City. Upon turning 18, Yochi joined the IDF and served as a commander in a course for Judaism and Zionism for soldiers who aren't Jewish and new immigrants. Following her service, she studied Political Science and Middle Eastern studies at Bar Ilan University, and then served as an executive assistant at an Israeli news agency. Realizing she wanted to be a part of something more meaningful, she happily started working for Women of the Wall in 2016, as director of Education and Community Outreach. Today, Yochi lives in Jerusalem with her husband and daughter, where they live an open-minded and feminist Orthodox lifestyle.

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