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Not a victory but a bitter defeat

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There have always been different opinions and different ways of doing things, but Jerusalem was the place that unified everyone.

This week, the government voted on a decision that ideally would never have been an issue. For the first time since the Temple was destroyed due to the sin of baseless hatred (sinat chinam), the Western Wall Plaza was divided among tribes. Alongside the traditional Western Wall Plaza, where Jews have prayed with devotion for centuries, there will now be an additional plaza for streams that are new and that renew.

Had our forefathers and mothers been able to participate in the government's deliberations, they would have surely reminded us of the terrible price that our nation paid for separatism and jealousy. They would have told us in tears about the camps fighting one another leading to bloodshed in a besieged Jerusalem, while all around the Romans were already constructing siege towers. They would have reminded us how high the price was the last time different streams tried to enforce their ways on all of Jerusalem. If our forefathers and mothers could have participated in the vote on tearing the Western Wall into camps and factions, the proposal would have been tossed out in disgust. Dividing the Western Wall? Separating Jews at this holy site? Rejecting every compromise as long as every person gets, at the Western Wall, the stage on which to express his religious innovations? Who could have imagined such a thing? Nobody won this vote. All of us, all of Am Yisrael, and our descendants and their descendants, lost. We lost the rare unity that was created around the Western Wall and that was the symbol of the Jewish nation throughout all the years of its long exile. Jews in Morocco and Poland, in Persia and England did not yearn for a wall of stones. They yearned for the Divine revelation that appears when the tribes of Israel gather in Jerusalem.

“And He was King in Yeshurun, whenever the sum total of the people was gathered, and the tribes of Israel were together.”

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the place that unified everyone.

Jerusalem was the place to which one came with humility, not with a sense of ownership and privilege. All this was lost at the vote yesterday. It was lost to all of us.

For many years, I worked in ways that were both manifest and hidden in order to restore peace to the Western Wall. I agreed to far-reaching compromises in the belief that “peace is greater.” But in the face of the zealous and incessant attack on the Western Wall by various organizations, and the poisonous atmosphere that was spreading, the government, with no choice and with a heavy heart, had to accept a divisive decree, and remove from the Western Wall Plaza the flame of dissent that threatened to destroy everything in its path.

Now that the decree has been made, we have only to pray that a path will be found to reunite. “Have we not all one father? Has not one God created us? Why should we betray, each one his brother, to profane the covenant of our forefathers?” (Malachi 2). The Heavens know that I did all that I could to prevent this schism. Now we must do everything we can to pave the way back to unity in Jerusalem.

The author is rabbi of the Western Wall and holy sites.



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