

# High Holy Day Prayer At The Western Wall

By Herb Keinon

(WZPS) — Rosh Hashana morning, 8.30, the second day. The white stone courtyard that leads up to the Kotel (Western Wall) is filling up. Against a deep blue, cloudless Jerusalem sky, the sun inches its way over the Mount of Olives. The raspy, distinctively Middle Eastern sound of two nasal, elongated Arab words are heard from a nearby minaret: "Allah Akbar," God is great.

A steady flow of Jewish worshippers make their way to the Kotel - men to the left, women to the right. A 4-year-old boy, knitted yarmulke hanging over the tip of his left ear, grabs his father's hand and parts from his mother who looks after them waving her hand.

### Many Styles of Prayer

Men file into the courtyard past a stand filled with cardboard yarmulkes for the unprepared. Beyond the stand the worshippers are met by men trying to lure them to their particular minyan. Pray where the leader speeds through the service, or where he punctuates it with operatic-sounding interludes. Pray where the Hebrew accent is Lithuanian, Moroccan or twentieth century Israeli. The accents are different; the prayers more or less the same.

Dozens of services are taking place simultaneously. Some have barely a quorum of 10; others have well over 50. The Kaddish of one service blends in with the Mussaf recitation of another. Here the Shema is recited, there the shofar is blown. It is an unorganized emporium of services. While one minyan is taking out the Torah, another minyan puts it back. It is jumbled and confused; it is fascinating to watch.

One of the minyans begins the Haftorah reading. A young, clean-shaven man in his early twenties, wearing sandals, blue pants and a tallit

over his short-sleeved wrinkled white shirt, reads from Jeremiah: "Behold, I will bring them from the north country, and gather them from the uttermost parts of the earth..."

How appropriate the verse seems as one looks out upon the vast collection of Jews gathered in front of the Kotel. A list of their native lands reads like the index of a world atlas: Afghanistan, Brazil, Canada, Ethiopia, France... The variety of their native tongues seem a partial catalogue of the world's languages: Arabic, Belorussian, Czech, Dutch, English... Yet they have made their way to Israel, and their sons and daughters speak Hebrew.

The reader of the Haftorah continues: "And there is hope for thy future, saith the Lord; and thy children shall return to their own border."

### Multitudes of Worshippers

A group of tourists speaking a Scandinavian language lean upon the iron chain that separates the praying of the courtyard from the socializing of the plaza area behind it. Here friends meet, high school students flirt, people watch people. One of the tourists takes out a pocket camera and points it at the praying, swaying masses. An elderly Sephardic guard, identified by a blue hat with a badge attached, runs toward the tourist yelling ferociously in heavy accented English: "No camera today. No, No." The tourist, eyes lowered, slips the camera back into his pocket.

Indeed the sight would be a photographer's delight. There are worshippers in green army uniforms; American tourists in coats and ties; hassidim wearing black pants, black coats and fur streimels. Children - some with suspenders and corkscrew earlocks, others with shorts and sandals - run, jump and slide across the courtyard as their fathers pray. Here a man sways wildly, there a man stands dead still with his arm upon the Kotel, his head upon his arm. Some men have a tallit draped over their heads, others have it loosely around their shoulders, still others just have fringes jutting out from underneath their shirts. Some wear fedoras while

others sport only yarmulkes. In the plaza area, a group of four border patrolmen, identifiable by their green berets, sit smoking and laughing, their M-16s resting on their knees. They sit and watch as the variegated Jewish world parades before them.

### The Women's Side

On the women's side there are no organized services; no minyan groups. Rather, the women crowd close to the wall and pray privately. Some weep loudly, others raise their hands imploringly toward heaven. A few place their ears close to the six-foot slatted metal mehitza (partition), hoping to hear some of the Torah being read on the other side. But the din is so great it is doubtful anything can be heard.

At the entrance to the women's section, a guard hands shoulder shawls to women he deems to be immodestly dressed. Many are the elegantly coiffured wigs, the black scarfs and colorful kerchiefs and hats worn by married, observant women. Many, also, are the heads left uncovered. A young girl in pigtails and black stockings - hand in hand with an identically dressed playmate - skips across the width of the women's section. Her mother passes her a disapproving look. The girl stops in mid-stride, picks up a prayer book and approaches the Kotel.

Referring to the Kotel, the late Conservative Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote: "No comeliness to be acclaimed, no beauty to be relished. But a heart and an ear." On Rosh Hashana many are those who walk to the Kotel to speak to this ear, derive comfort from this heart. It seems a most fitting way to start the new year.

JERUSALEM (WNS) — Two Israeli Arabs were sentenced to life imprisonment for the terrorist-related murder of an Israeli soldier in August 1984. The sentences were imposed by a military court in Lod. The accused had pleaded guilty, but justified their crime as a political act. Four other men arrested with them last March pleaded not guilty and will be tried at a later date.

# Happy New Year



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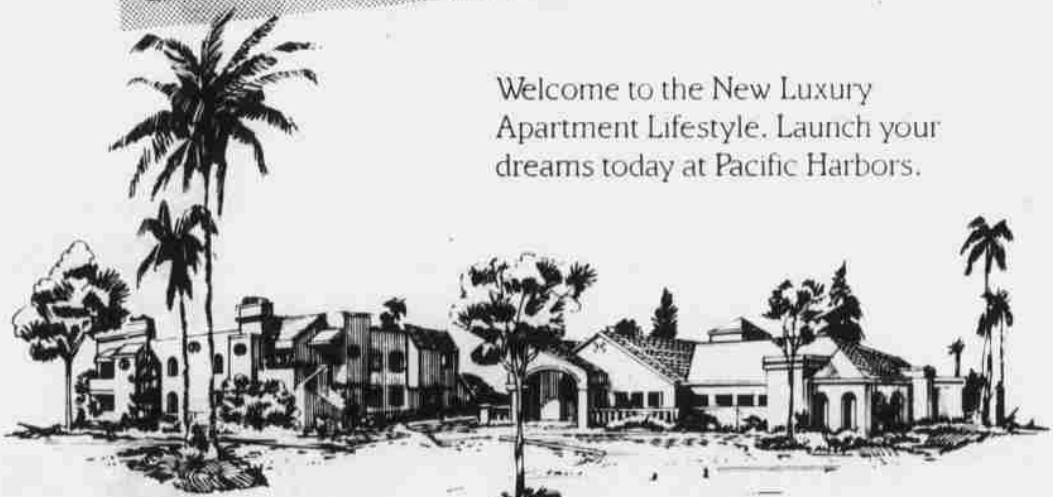


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