In Commemoration of September 11

The prophet Jeremiah witnessed Jerusalem set ablaze and the Holy Temple obliterated by marauding Babylonian troops. Despite observing these traumatic events as well as the forcible exile of Israelites to Babylonia, Jeremiah impeccably believed that out of that calamity would arise another formation of the people of the Torah. In his metaphor we could be “like a tree planted by waters, sending forth its roots by a stream” thereby sprouting life anew. (Jer. 17:8)

In fact Jeremiah was right. The destruction of the Temple in 586 BCE, the fall of Jerusalem, the exile to Babylon was not our people’s demise. Rather it emerged as a catalyst for the origin of Jewish life as we know and live it today.

Our history incorporates destruction and rebirth. When the Holy Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed our ancestors sat by the rivers of Babylon and wept. When the glorious synagogues of central Europe and the people who entered them were destroyed our people worldwide gazed in horror at the obliteration of entire communities and wept. When the voice and song of the Jewish community of Spain was silenced during the Inquisition, the exquisite synagogue of Toledo made into a Church, our people wept.

But we rebuilt. We moved from house to house, country to country, and from continent to continent. In every era we Jews survived and shouted songs of exultation. When we could we returned to rebuild our homes and our synagogues. We did not forget our losses. We built upon the foundations of memory and commitment.

In his time Nehemiah saw the collapsed walls of Jerusalem “which were broken down and the gates thereof were consumed with fire.” (2.13) Nehemiah called upon the people to remake the walls of Jerusalem. In response the people cried out “Nakum oo-va-nee-nu” “Let us rise up and build” (2.18)

As we commemorate the tenth anniversary of the 9/11 tragedy the venture before us as a city and nation is not only to rebuild physical structures. Rather this is a time to re-imagine ourselves as an embodiment of Jewish survival and pledge ourselves to the mission of our people, that is to help all others by being a light, sharing our strength, enlarging our vision and courageously believing that every problem in our community is solvable and every dream is attainable...for the good of us all.

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