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Shomrei Emunah To Mark Jerusalem Day With Unique Performance

By Maayan Jaffe



“Yom Yerushalayim is to 1967 what Yom Ha’atzmaut is to 1948,” said Mike Lowenstein of Baltimore.

Lowenstein, along with a cadre of other Congregation Shomrei Emunah members, is orchestrating what he thinks might be the synagogue’s first-ever Jerusalem Day program (or at least the first in many years).

Jerusalem Day celebrates the reunification of Jerusalem and the establishment of Israeli control over the Old City in June 1967. In Israel, the day is marked by state ceremonies, memorial services for soldiers who died in the battle for Jerusalem and parades through downtown Jerusalem.

This year, the Baltimore Jewish community will go back in time to explore the history of Jerusalem, the painful battle to win it back and the euphoria of learning that we did. A one-man show, “Paratrooper in Jerusalem,” enacted by Shlomo Horwitz on May 5 will be the platform.

Horwitz runs Jewish Crossroads, a program that helps adults and teens explore and discover the beauty of Judaism. The premise, according to Horwitz’s website: Everybody loves reality-based drama, whether it be on TV, cable or at the movies. Not only that, people remember movies or shows they’ve seen decades ago.

So at 8 p.m. at the Greenspring Avenue synagogue, Horwitz will take his 25 years of experience in Jewish education and outreach and bring Jerusalem to life.

Lowenstein said Horwitz has presented his various Crossroads shows throughout the country, in England and Israel, but rarely in Baltimore and never at Shomrei.

“I am very excited to finally see one of Shlomo’s performances, which have received excellent reviews, and for the Baltimore community to be introduced to Shlomo’s Jewish Crossroads and similarly benefit from what he has to offer,” Lowenstein said.

The *Baltimore Jewish Times* caught up with Horwitz ahead of his performance.

JT: Walk JT readers through the May 5 program.

Horwitz: It’s a live program. I am starting out by playing guitar, doing a kumsitz with songs about Jerusalem. Then, I become three characters. The main character is Gadi Alon, a composite of a number of people I have read about and interviewed.

It takes a lot of work to prepare?

To prepare, I read a lot of books about the Six Day War and the history of Jerusalem in the Old City before 1948. And I also interviewed by phone or email three paratroopers who fought in the war of 1967. I spoke to Ori, the son of Motta Gur, who was the colonel that commanded the troops that liberated the Kotel. He added some commentary, told me some stuff I was not aware of and that I have now incorporated into the program.

You’ve done this program before?

I have done this program about a dozen times. I did it in Israel. I have done it in California. ... I did it at Yeshivat Rambam many years ago.

Why this story? Why do you re-enact this drama?

This is something I think is very moving, a moving story that speaks to every Jew. ... One of the goals of the performance is to bring that moment [of the liberation of the Old City] alive and also to use [this play] as an opportunity to teach about the importance of Jerusalem in the Jewish psyche.

It’s a history lesson then?

I review the history of that spot [the Old City of Jerusalem], and it becomes an educational tool to teach people about Jerusalem and its history.

Your Crossroads program is about inspiring the Jewish community. Will this be inspirational, too?

I hope so. It aims to inspire. I have 20 different programs. This one [talks about] what it felt like to live in Jerusalem before 1948, before the Jordanians kicked us out — Jewish life and real life in Jerusalem before ’48. But it also captures the essence of what Jerusalem means to us.

Why is Yom Yerushalayim so important?

Yom Yerushalayim is the celebration of our renewed access to the holiest site on earth. One thing I try to demonstrate in this is that all of mankind — Jewish or not — have roots in Jerusalem. The first man was created from the earth of Jerusalem, and we all come from him.

We venerate that spot. ... To have it again is a gift from *Hashem* and worth celebrating.

What about all those people who died getting it back?

There were tremendous losses in recovering Jerusalem. One of the paratroopers I interviewed told me for him it is a sad day. He goes to gravesites of the soldiers with whom he served. So, yes, it is not simply a happy day; it is a day for sadness, too. But for most of us, despite the tremendous losses and sacrifices, it is really a gift from God to recover these most holy sites.

You don't think the Orthodox members of Shomrei already know the history?

We all know it deep down. I am hoping a program like this will take something we all know is important and ... make it more relevant in our daily lives. With any topic I tackle, I try to take something people already know [about] and make it more relevant and interesting and look at angles not previously known.

Will non-Orthodox people find it worth coming, too?

I certainly hope so.

What's the highlight?

The most powerful part is the moment that Gadi reaches the Western Wall and touches it for the first time. ... Most of the time, I choke up then; it is very powerful. I try to share that with the audience and bring them into world of a paratrooper who got there in 1967.

What happens after May 5?

That depends on each individual, but I hope that after May 5 the people who come will have a deeper appreciation for Jerusalem. How they act is up to them.

THE SHOMREI EMUNAH ISRAEL COMMITTEE PRESENTS:

Paratrooper In Jerusalem: A Yom Yerushalayim Event
Featuring Shlomo Horwitz

Sunday, May 5 at 8 p.m.
Congregation Shomrei Emunah, 6221 Greenspring Ave.

Suitable for adults, college and high school students. Open to the entire community. Admission is free.

Sponsored by Rabbi Binyamin and Miriam Marwick, Leeba and Binyomin Berger, Layne and Mike Lowenstein, Janet and Fred Sunness, Rosemary and Peter Warschawski and anonymous.

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Photo captions:

Shlomo Horwitz's Jewish Crossroads is a program that explores the beauty of Judaism. (Photo by Justin Tsucalas