

# Reclaiming the Western Wall (1967)

[Excerpts taken from [www.VirtualJerusalem.com](http://www.VirtualJerusalem.com)]

Before the war in 1967, the notion that Israelis would be touching the stones of the Western Wall had not even been dreamt of.

On the first day of the war, the Israeli government met in the cellar of the Knesset. It was decided that Motta Gur's paratroopers would break into East Jerusalem to link with the Israeli unit on Mount Scopus that was under attack from the Jordanians. The battles in East Jerusalem continued for one night and one day. On Wednesday morning, June 7th, the paratroopers stormed into the Old City and immediately advanced to the Temple Mount.

At 10:20 on June 7th 1967, the third day of the Six-Day War, Raphael Amir of the Israel Broadcasting Services announced, "At this moment we are going through the Lion's Gate in a jeep with the Deputy Chief-of-Staff and the commander of the Central Command. I am now in the shadows cast by the gate. Now we are in the sun again, in the street. We are inside the Old City. The soldiers are up against the walls." In the background could be heard noises of shooting and soldiers shouting, "To the Wall! To the Wall!"

Over his communications system, Motta Gur made the historic announcement, "The Temple Mount is in our hands." The paratroopers gathered on the Temple Mount, and began to rush towards the Western Wall.

Above the sounds of a shofar, and soldiers singing "Yerushalayim Shel Zahav," Motta Gur described the scene to radio listeners all over the country: "It's hard to express what we're feeling in words. We saw the Old City to our right when we were on the crest of Augusta Victoria. We enjoyed the view and now we are hoarse from so much shouting and the excitement of coming in at the head of this convoy. Our half-track broke open the gate and went over a motorbike. It went through the Jordanian camp and we were the first to get up to the Temple Mount, in great excitement. Moishale, who's been my deputy for many years, took some men and ran to raise the flag above the Western Wall. Now the whole Old City is in our hands and we are very happy."

At 2 o'clock in the afternoon, Major-General Uzi Narkiss returned to the wall with Chief-of-Staff, General Yitzhak Rabin and the Minister of Defense, Moshe Dayan. In his diary, Narkiss detailed the occasion. "We arrived at the Western Wall. The crowd now is larger than this morning. Cheering soldiers clear a place for the Minister of Defense and his entourage and we all get to the Wall. Dayan takes a piece of paper from his pocket and pushes it in a space between two stones, Koby Sharett asks him what was written on it and Dayan replies, 'May there be peace on Israel.'"

Minutes later, Moshe Dayan read out the following statement, "We have returned to our most holy place, never again to leave it. To its Arab neighbors, the State of Israel extends its hands in peace, and assures all other religions that it will maintain full freedom and honor all their religious rights. We have not come to conquer others' holy places or to curtail their religious rights but to guarantee the unity of the city and live in it with the others in harmony."

Despite all the dignitaries, army officers, politicians and rabbis who had visited the wall, the President of Israel, Zalman Shazar, had not yet seen the Wall. When Narkiss was told that the President wanted to visit the Wall, he tried to persuade Shazar that the situation remained far too dangerous. The President persisted, spelling out his opinion in no uncertain terms, "Young Man! Pay attention! The President of Israel must go to the Wall! I am not talking about Zalman Shazar. He is already an old man; what he could do in life, he's already done. It is not important whether he lives or dies. But the President of the State of Israel must go to the Wall. It's in your hands! I ask you to consider what security arrangements can be made for the President of Israel and then give your estimate of the risk involved. If it is very serious, I will not go... But if the risk is not very great, the President will go up to the Wall." The President of the State of Israel immediately set off for the Wall.