

Imagination: Ed Koch's Bold Proposal on Jerusalem

Written by Dr. Michael Berenbaum
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Ed Koch was the long time mayor of New York and a former Congressman. He has been in New York politics and he surely knows the rough and tumble of the political world. One of Israel's staunchest supporters, he is quick to attack anyone, even President Obama, who is critical of Israel.

So attention must be paid when Koch proposes a solution to the thorny problem of Jerusalem. He begins with five basic assumptions:

Jerusalem must remain unified; It must remain the capital of Israel; The political needs of its diverse citizens, Arab and Jew, Christian, Muslim and Jew, must be considered; The Holy City is sacred to Jews, Christians and Moslems; • The Palestinians want Jerusalem as their capital as well.

How can all of these seemingly contradictory needs be satisfied?

Koch borrows from his experience in New York City and recommends a Borough System. New York has five Boroughs of unequal size and population and dare we say it – of unequal importance. But it is one city. And the needs of the city are met – sometimes well and sometimes poorly by basic political struggles.

Koch's suggestion:

To situate the new Palestinian capital in that part of East Jerusalem that is occupied overwhelmingly by Palestinians, allow the inhabitants of East Jerusalem—Jews, Christians, Muslims and those living elsewhere in the city—to pick the state to which to pledge their allegiance and to cast two votes - one in municipal elections for one mayor to govern the entire city of Jerusalem, and a separate vote in national elections related to the Jewish and Palestinian states living peacefully side by side.

Jews living in the Arab Borough of the old city Jerusalem can choose Israeli citizenship.

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Presumably the Neturei Karta could chose Palestinian citizenship as well. And Arabs could choose the citizenship they desire. The city would remain free and open and the City Council would reflect the needs of its constituents and have to work together to make the whole city work.

I don't know if Koch's proposal will work but it does show that once the issue is engaged, once serious thinkers think about it seriously, new possibilities arise.

Just a fortnight ago, another of Israel's most ardent supporters, the Nobel Prize Winner Elie Wiesel wrote an appeal on Jerusalem. Jerusalem is above politics, the sage wrote. Jerusalem should be left to last; the memories too deep, the issues too irreconcilable. He made a forceful case for Jewish memory, but did treat Christian or Moslem memories. His misstated some basic facts – Arabs can not live anywhere they want is Jerusalem—but Wiesel is a poet and story teller.

Only politics can solve the issue of Jerusalem, not crude crass and unimaginative politics, but wise and visionary politics.

Koch instead proposes that Jerusalem be moved to the top of the agenda. The Psalmist said; "If I do not raise Jerusalem,,,"

New York crusty old former mayor has given us a gift for Jerusalem Day, the day that Jerusalem was unified 43 years ago tomorrow.

If Jerusalem can be solved, then anything is possible.