

JERUSALEM IN THE TANAKH by Rabbi David Rosen

While the city of Shalem is mentioned in Genesis in connection with Abraham and his meeting with Melchizedek of that city, the full name Jerusalem enters onto the Biblical stage in connection with David and its establishment as his royal city, serving as the capital around which all the tribes of Israel are united. However it is the erection of the Temple by David's son Solomon that endows the city as a whole with unique holiness, in keeping with the instruction already given to the children of Israel recorded in the book of Deuteronomy 12, v.5 concerning the place for sacred offerings: "And you shall come there...to the place which the Lord your God will choose from amongst all your tribes to place His Name there" (cf. II Kings 21,v.4). Accordingly the people would come up from far and wide in pilgrimage to the city, to the Temple, three times a year, on the Festivals of Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles as commanded in Deut.,ch.16,v.16.

The unique sanctity of the Temple site not only invested the whole city with a special holiness, but also lent to its identification with major Biblical events, not least of all the Akedah, Abraham's binding of his son before God on the mountain in the land of Moriah as narrated in Genesis 22. Thus the Temple Mount is known as Mt. Moriah as we find in II Chronicles, ch. 3,v.1. Reflecting the emanation of holiness from the Temple Mount to the city as a whole, the other name for the mount -Zion- was used to embrace the whole of Jerusalem (cf. I Kings 8, v. 1 ; Isaiah 1, v.27.) This extended relationship is perhaps most powerfully expressed in Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the Temple,recorded in the first book of Kings, ch.8, where he speaks of the various persons, Israelites and foreigners, as well as the various opportunities, that will bring people to the Temple or make them focus their minds and hearts on it from elsewhere. In verse 44 Solomon speaks of "they (who) will pray to the Lord, toward the city which You have chosen, and the house which I have built for Your Name".

The greatness and splendor of Jerusalem are described in the Bible in hyperbolic poetic imagery, such as in the Psalms - "beautiful in elevation, the joy of all the earth" (Psalm 48,v.3) and "perfection of beauty, the joy of all the earth" (ch.2, v.15); and in the Song of Songs (ch.6,v.4), the beloved is compared to Jerusalem as the symbol of beauty and loveliness. Similarly in the "Songs of Ascents" (Ps. 122, 125, and 132) the pilgrims praise Jerusalem in hyperbole.

Whereas mention has been made of how the whole city becomes an extension of the Temple Mount, in Psalm 137, "Zion" and "Jerusalem" become symbols of the whole land and in the ominous term "the day of Jerusalem" the city symbolizes the humiliation of the land, the people and their Exile. Thus in the Prophets and in Lamentations, the name and the concept of Jerusalem are frequently employed to represent the whole of Judah. Indeed Jerusalem embodies the conduct and the deeds of the people of Judah and is identified with them,as well as with the whole of Israel,for good or ill.

The destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem with it, are seen accordingly in the Hebrew Bible as the ultimate catastrophe. Nevertheless, destruction and exile are seen only as a temporary situation and prophetic literature expresses the total trust in Divine Love and commitment to His eternal promise as articulated in Leviticus 26,v.44 & 45, that will ultimately bring about the city's restoration and reunification with the people. The chapters of

consolation in the book of Isaiah, chapters 40 and 66, contain an abundance of expression of fervent love for Zion and Jerusalem on the one hand and on the other, descriptions in hyperbolic poetic style of its anticipated future greatness and splendor, with its expected restoration. The Prophetic view of an exalted future for Jerusalem includes both physical splendor and a sublime religious-spiritual significance referring both to the near future and to the end of days. In Jeremiah's detailed vision of the rebuilt Jerusalem, (chapters 30 and 31) not only the Temple but the whole city will be "sacred to the Lord. Ezekiel (chapters 45 & 48) to an even greater degree endows this vision of the restored Holy City with a transcendent aspect in which the whole city, entirely sanctified to God as the abode of the Divine Presence, will be called "The Lord is there". The vision of Zechariah recorded in the eighth chapter of the book(v. 3-5) is substantially restorative looking towards that day when Jerusalem will be called "the faithful city, and the mountain of the Lord of Hosts, the holy mountain", and once again its "streets will be filled with old men and old women and boys and girls will play there". However later on in chapter fourteen (v.16-21) his vision goes even beyond that of Ezekiel viewing the sanctity of the city of the Temple as having a universal nature which will be recognized by all the nations serving as international focus for universal pilgrimage. This is in keeping with the vision of Isaiah, echoed by Micah, in which the place names "the mountain of the House of the Lord" and "the House of the God of Jacob" are identified with Zion, Jerusalem, from whence learning, justice and peace will emanate to all the nations.

It was this vision and hope that nurtured Jewish life throughout the long second exile and dispersion, animating its continuous albeit sometimes sparse Jewish presence in the city and in the land as a whole. Wherever Jews were as wherever they are today, they all faced and face towards Jerusalem in prayer anticipating its complete physical and spiritual reconstitution in thrice daily services and grace after every meal.

Referring to the vision of and for Jerusalem, I would like to focus here upon one of the aforementioned multitude of texts extolling Jerusalem's virtues, namely, Psalm 122 which is devoted to the city. In this Psalm, in verse 6, we are told: "Seek the peace of Jerusalem; those that love you shall prosper". Yet even within the Biblical period to which my presentation is restricted, that statement seems to be questionable at the very least. But surely for we who have the perspective today of thousands of years during which so many nations, powers and religions, have fought over Jerusalem, these words must sound ironic! Have those who have loved Jerusalem prospered? Surely most of those who have loved Jerusalem throughout history - Jews, Christians and Muslims - have overwhelmingly suffered for their love of Jerusalem! Have more tears and blood been shed over any one city?

Many people know the comment of our sages two thousand years ago that "ten portions of beauty came down to the world, nine were taken by Jerusalem and one by the rest of the world". Jerusalem is indeed a uniquely beautiful city, not only in the eyes of we Jerusalemites but, for all who hold her dear. She is especially beautiful precisely because like all that is most beautiful, her beauty is not just superficial, but runs so deep in the love and attachment of so many from different denominations and traditions.

However this comment concerning Jerusalem's beauty is followed by another statement that is less well known. It declares that also

"ten portions of pain came down to the world; nine were taken by Jerusalem and one went to the rest of the world". That seems to be a more accurate description of history than the aforementioned verse six in Psalm 122!

Yet we may understand the meaning of that verse if we study another in that selfsame Psalm. Verse three declares: "Jerusalem that is built up, is like a city that has been joined together". What is the meaning of 'joined together'? Our ancient Jewish sages had two interpretations. One of them in the Palestinian Talmud, tractate Hagigah, declares that it means that "Jerusalem makes all Israel friends". Indeed this is in consonance with the next verse and the vision of the festive pilgrimages of the people to Jerusalem to which I referred earlier. Yet, the idea is rooted in the historical origins and role of Jerusalem. It had been a Jebusite citadel initially unconquered by the tribes, and so, even though it was on the border of Judah and Benjamin, it was not occupied as part and parcel of their territories. Thus, Jerusalem provided David with an ideal territorial focus around which, as I have mentioned, the different tribes could rally, none feeling that the city belonged exclusively to any one particular tribe but that it was a capital in which they could all feel that they had a stake. Accordingly Jerusalem expressed the ideal of uniting different elements through a common focus, above and beyond their disparities and separateness.

Thus we may now understand the deeper meaning of verse six that tells us that "those that love Jerusalem" and "seek her peace shall prosper". If "the peace of Jerusalem" refers to the idea of uniting disparate identities in a higher ideal and transcendent focus, then it is indeed the special "peace of Jerusalem" that unifies us. Shalom-peace- comes from the word "shalem" meaning complete, unified, and it is that peace of Jerusalem that raises us up and above our differences and vested interests. It is indeed that peace that enables us to prosper. This idea - the essence of the name and ethos of Jerusalem ("ir shalem")- declares the ultimate religio-ethical message of our Faiths; namely that there is a higher meaning, value, and purpose in life, than our particular vested interests and that it is that transcendent dimension which is of ultimate enduring value. This is the message, the dimension of the higher and eternal beauty of Jerusalem.

Jerusalem, of course, is inevitably a geo-political entity, inescapably part and parcel of peoples' legitimate geo-political interests. Nevertheless to truly love her means to recognize her beauty and meaning above and beyond those interests and competing

exclusivist claims. When we seek, strive, for this peace of Jerusalem, then we - all who live here and love her - will truly prosper.

Echoing this idea is the other Talmudic explanation (Ta'anit 5a) on the verse in Psalm 122 - "Jerusalem rebuilt, is like a city joined together". It explains that the "joining together" refers to that of Jerusalem below, i.e. earthly Jerusalem, with Jerusalem above, i.e. heavenly Jerusalem. Ultimate redemption, it indicates, involves the fusion of the two - the transcendent beauty of Jerusalem, together with her corporeal beauty. Then, Jerusalem will truly be rebuilt, "shalem", (i.e. complete), "ir shalem" - the city of peace. Then, say our sages (Exodus Rabbah, 52), she will not only be a unique focus of beauty but also a unique focus of joy - of pain no more - in accordance with the description of the Psalmist (Psalm 48,v 3)

"O vision of beauty, the joy of the whole earth!"