

## Walking Together in Jerusalem

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**Rabbi David Rosen**

The unique defining character of Jerusalem for Judaism is encapsulated in the *Mishnah*, in the first chapter of the tractate *Kelim*. While dealing with matters pertaining to tithes and offerings brought to the Temple – their origins and place of consumption, the *Mishnah* presents a view of the world that is made up of emanating spheres of sanctity. The Holy of Holies is presented as the most sacred spot in the world – in effect the fulcrum of sacred space in the universe. Then there is the rest of the Temple Mount. The emanation of holiness extends to the city of Jerusalem, or Zion, as a whole and thereafter to the rest of the Holy Land and beyond. We are accordingly presented with an image of sanctity radiating outwards to the whole world from Zion.

The city's holiness is thus derived from "the place where God chose to cause His Name to dwell", where the Temple was erected accordingly (Deut. 12:5.11; 1 Kings 8; 2 Kings 21:4; Ps 132).

Indeed, the fact that the site is considered intrinsically holy for Judaism means that even in the absence of the Temple and in the absence of the appropriate rites of purification required for entry into the Temple precincts, the site is considered to be "out of bounds" and Jews are religiously prohibited to enter thereupon (Of course in the modern secular State of Israel, this religious prohibition is not enforced, even though for security reasons the Israeli police will still assist the Muslim *Wakf* in ensuring that no non-Muslim conducts prayers anywhere on the Temple Mount precinct).

The central role of Jerusalem in the religious national life of the Jewish people made it the focus of their collective identity, even to the point where Jerusalem or Zion became synonymous not only with the whole Holy Land, but even with the people itself, both for better and for worse.

Indeed, throughout the exile, the image of the restoration of Jerusalem is central to the sustaining expectation of national return and revival. A powerful expression of this in the Sabbath morning liturgy declares <<Have mercy on Zion for she is the house of our life>>. Furthermore all formal Jewish prayer may be described as <<Jerusalem orientated>> by the very fact that Jews are required to turn towards Jerusalem in prayer three times a day.

However Jerusalem has a universal import beyond the focus and personification of particular Jewish religious and national life. Jewish tradition sees the first Biblical reference to Jerusalem by the name of *Shalem* in Gen. 14:18 – the city of *Melchizedek* who welcomed Abraham with bread and wine and praised the Most High God. The very first reference to Jerusalem is thus associated both with the recognition of "the One Source of all life", as well as with the idea of hospitality and human acceptance of the other. The Rabbinical interpretations of the name, Jerusalem as coming from the Hebrew word for peace, as well as that for reverence or faith in God, reflect this idea. Yet beyond the universal availability of the Temple as envisaged by Solomon at its dedication (1 Kings 8:41), prophetic literature envisions restored Jerusalem as a universal center of moral light, righteousness and justice for all peoples. (e.g. Jer. 3:17; 33:16; Isa 1:26-27; Mic. 4:1-5; Ps 89:15).

Moreover, even the political motives that led David to establish the conquered Jebusite citadel as his capital city, contain a universal message.

In his mission to unite the different tribes into one nation, David realized the importance of a capital that was not already part of any of the tribes' territories and with which all could identify accordingly.

Jerusalem provided this role and thus for the nation symbolized the need and goal of transcending tribal interests for the greater good. This idea acquired its full embodiment with the establishment of the Temple of Solomon and the three annual pilgrim festivals for which the national went up to Jerusalem in devotion (Deut. 16:16).

Moreover Solomon envisaged the Temple precisely as a place of universal devotion to the One God (1 Kings 8:41-43).

Our grasp of this idea which Jerusalem is meant to personify – i.e., overcoming our differences through our common attachment to her – enables us to gain a deeper understanding of the meaning of Psalm 122, that expresses the pilgrim's joy at being in Jerusalem. The Psalm contains a verse that seems rather ironic in historical perspective. Verse six urges us to "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem" and declares that those that love her "shall prosper". Yet did all those who loved Jerusalem down the course of history, actually prosper? Surely there is hardly a city in the world over which more blood has been spilt and more tears have been cried – mostly of those who loved her, by those who loved her! Yet if the real meaning of "the peace of Jerusalem" means the idea of bringing together different groups who nevertheless transcend their differences in a shared higher commitment, then the meaning of the verse appears to be particularly poignant both historically and above all for Jerusalem today.. Most of those tears and bloodshed over Jerusalem were the result precisely of failure to respect the attachment of others to Jerusalem, as particular communities or faiths claimed exclusive embrace of the city. However those who truly love Jerusalem, the Psalmist appears to be saying, must be able to transcend that exclusivity and while certainly not diminishing their own particular attachments, learn to live with respect for those of others who hold Jerusalem dear: That is the key to "the peace of Jerusalem". When we learn to love her as the embodiment of that ideal – then we will all truly prosper.

Indeed, the perception of a morally constructive relationship between the particular and universal is central to the biblical Prophetic ideal that Jerusalem personifies. The vision of the messianic age is not of a denationalized society, by rater of a truly international society in which many nations shall go up to the mountain of the Lord and "nation shall not lift up sword against nation", etc. (Mic. 4:2-3; cf. Isa. 11).

It should in theory be natural for Jews, Christians and Muslims to live in mutual respect in Jerusalem not only because of their respective affirmations of the transcendent reality that we call God, who is also immanent in our lives, but also precisely because there is so much in common in their different traditions' views of the city. While the three have their own religious mythic historical associations with the city – for Christianity it is the geographical location of the key historical events of its fundamental faith tenets and for Islam it is the place whence the prophet ascended to Heaven on the *Miraj*, his miraculous night journey to Heaven – they

respectively share a sense of the central spiritual significance of the city in the life of their traditions.

This binding nature of such perception should be reinforced above all by the shared ethical monotheistic heritage that all three see as going back to Abraham our common Father. Indeed Judaism identifies and names the Temple Mount as the Biblical *Moriah* where Abraham was willing to make the supreme sacrifice for his faith in the One God (Gen. 22:2).

Undoubtedly the potential for cooperation between the children of Abraham has been overshadowed by their competition in which, as already mentioned, exclusive claims of inheritance have sought to deny the legitimacy of other members of the Family.

Yet if we are to live together in peace in the holy land and especially in Jerusalem, then we have to learn precisely to respect the different deep psycho-spiritual attachments that make up the identities of the peoples who both live and who are attached to this place.

This is not a simple matter as each of the faith communities retains the memory of victimization by one or both of the others. Moreover, the vast majority still suffer from a great deal of ignorance about one another.

There is a well-known statement of the sages of the Talmud that declares that “ten portions of beauty came down to the world – nine went to Jerusalem and one to the rest of the world”. We who love Jerusalem have no doubt of the veracity of this comment. For Jerusalem’s beauty, like any lasting beauty, is far more than skin deep. While she does have a lovely external aspect to her, her beauty is precisely the spiritual beauty that reflects the depths of devotion that made Jerusalem so significant to so many from the Traditions of Abraham: Jews, Christians and Muslims.

Less well known is the continuation of the aforementioned comment which adds “ten portions of pain came down to the world – nine went to Jerusalem and one to the rest of the world”, a statement that reflects the abovementioned historical reality of blood and tears that has predominantly been the fate of Jerusalem and her peoples.

As indicated above, the ultimate vision for Jerusalem as envisaged by the Prophets and Sages, anticipates the final realization of Jerusalem’s name as city of peace, in which she will no longer be a city of pain, but only of beauty and joy (Ps 48:3; Exodus Rabbah, 52). This vision will be facilitated only when we all who feel bound to this city truly strive for the aforementioned “peace of Jerusalem” in which the different attachments to Jerusalem live in mutual respect, above and beyond their differences. Thereby Jerusalem will serve as a true beacon of light in the world and as the example it is meant to be of the coexistence between the particular and the universal which is so essential for the health and well being of humanity as a whole.