

Golden Jerusalem

Prayers for Jerusalem abound in traditional liturgy, the verbiage is quite eclectic, but they all focus on one theme, the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem and God's subsequent residence in the city. The only element of that theme I am comfortable with is the rebuilding of Jerusalem. Sacrificing innocent animals built in a temple to a thought construct, is not my cup of tea. But is there any sense in praying for the rebuilding of this city?

Jerusalem has already been rebuilt. In fact it is a bigger and more splendid city than it ever was in its history. If you include the suburbs of Jerusalem there are almost one million people living there. If, however, we focus on the human condition there is definitely a lot to fix in Jerusalem. Jerusalem, with all its splendor is one of the poorest cities in Israel. The glaring disparities between the rich and the poor, the Ashkenazim and Sephardim, the Haredim and the Secular, the Jews and the Arabs, are there for all to see. As an Israeli, as a Jew, and as a humanist, I thus find that there is plenty to pray for and to fix.

The following is my take on the very popular song composed by Naomi Shemer on the eve of the Six Day war. My take on the song focuses on the ills brought on by the war. All war is bad and brings with it death and destruction and a myriad of other ills, even the unavoidable defensive wars the Israelis fought. Though the Six Day war is celebrated in Jewish Israel, I find it hard to share in the celebration. Perhaps because it is because I wasn't born at a time of constant angst regarding Israel's existence, and primarily see the ills that this pivotal moment in Israeli history has brought. Though I can appreciate that the victory in this war brought with it a collective sigh of relief, I firmly believe we must strive to correct the ills that this war brought into the world. This is my prayer for Jerusalem:

Golden Jerusalem

The mountain air polluted with ash
Senseless war
Carried on the breeze
The sound of rage without appease.

Jerusalem of iniquity, of bullets
and of want, No balm exists, I cannot sing your song

And while thoughtful restraint slumbers
Captured in her thrall
The city sits solitary
For around it is a wall.

Why did we drain those prideful dregs,
Slipping on the dust of the Temple mount
Turning our victory into a rout

As I come to mourn you,
Crying on behalf of those you have oppressed
My cry is one of many, though I am obsessed
For your name scorches the lips
Like the kiss of a seraph
If I forget thee, Jerusalem,
Which was so golden...

We now share the cisterns
Salaam I hear from the market stall
A Muezzin calls out on Temple Mount
A shofar at the Western wall.

And in faces hewn from stones
Rays of hope are born -
And a stream now descends to the Dead Sea
By way of Jericho!

Jerusalem of gold, and of bronze and of light
Behold I am a violin for all your songs.

ירושלים של זהב

אֲוִיר הָרִים עָכוּר בְּפִיחַ וּמִלְחָמוֹת הַבָּלִים
נִשָּׂא מְרוֹם אֶל הַשָּׁמַיִם עִם קוֹלוֹת הַנְּאֻנְחִים
וּבִתְרֻדָּת פְּקֻחוֹת וְרֶסֶן שְׁבוּיִים בְּחֶרְמָה
הָעִיר אֲשֶׁר גָּאָה יוֹשְׁבֵת וּמִסְבִּיבָה חוֹמָה

יְרוּשָׁלַיִם שֶׁל חֶמֶס וְשֶׁל עוֹפְרָת וְשֶׁל מַחֲסוֹר
הֵלֵא לְרֵב פְּצַעֶיהָ אֵין לִי מְזוֹר

אֵיכָה לֹא בָחֲנוּ אֶת כּוֹס הַתְּרַעֲלָה
הִרְכַּנוּ רֹאשׁ בְּהַר הַבַּיִת, מְעַדְנוּ בְּעַפְרָה
וּבְלִבוֹת קִשִּׁים כְּסָלַע, טִמְּנוּ אֶת הַסְּפָקוֹת
בִּירְדָנוּ מִירוּשָׁלַיִם בְּדֶרֶךְ יְרִיחוֹ

אָה בְּבוֹאֵי הַיּוֹם לְסֹפֵד לָךְ
קִינָה לְעִשׂוּקִים
צַעֲקוֹתֵי הַיָּא אָה קִטְנָה,
אֲחַת מֵאֲלָפִים
כִּי שִׁמְךָ צוּרְב אֶת הַשְּׁפָתַיִם כְּנִשְׁיֵקֶת שְׁרָף
הוֹי עִירֵי יְרוּשָׁלַיִם אֲשֶׁר הִיְתָה זָהָב!

חֲלֹקְנוּ אֶת בִּזְרוֹת הַמַּיִם סְלֵאִם שְׁמַעְתִּי בְּכֶכֶר
מוֹאֲזִין מְסֻלָּס מֵהַר הַבַּיִת, בְּכַתֵּל קוֹל תְּרוּעָה
וּבְפָנִים קְשׁוֹת כְּסֵלַע רְאִיתִי אֶלְפֵי תִקְוֹת
וּמַעַן פְּרָץ אֶל יָם הַמֶּלַח בְּדֶרֶךְ יְרִיחוֹ

יְרוּשָׁלַיִם שֶׁל זָהָב וְשֶׁל נְחֹשֶׁת וְשֶׁל אוֹר
הֲלֹא לְכֹל שִׁירֶיךָ אֲנִי כְּבוֹר