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JERUSALEM IN POETRY AND SONG

In the Midrash there are 70 different names for Jerusalem. It is known as "The City of David" or just "The City," the capital and most important city of the one who conquered it from the Jebusites and gave it this name (Eliram 2006). Jerusalem is called Zion after Mount Zion, on which a part of the city was built. It also the name of the nation of Israel "For from Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem" (Isaiah).

In time Zion came to refer to the Holy Land (Eliram 2001). Therefore a Jew who believes in the national revival of the Land of Israel is known as a "Zionist" (Almog 2004).

According to legend, it was the Patriarch Abraham who gave Mount Moriah, where Jerusalem now stands, its name. It was a combination of awe – "yirah" – and peace – "shalem," a place where men find peace dwelling together, living in the fear of the Almighty. Since Biblical times Jerusalem has been a source for poetic and musical inspiration and elation. The history of Jerusalem could be written in song (Eliram 1995). The earliest songs for Jerusalem were written to be sung in the Temple of Solomon.

A Song and Psalm for the Sons of Korah
Great is the Lord and highly to be praised
In the city of God, the mountain of holiness.
Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth is Mount Zion
On the sides of the north, the city of the great King. (Ps. 48)

The Laments of Jeremiah the prophet, written after the destruction of the First Temple, are the earliest dirges of Zion.

How doth the city sit solitary that was full of people!
How she is become a widow!
She that was great among the nations, and princess among the provinces,
How is she become tributary! (Lamentations 1.1)

The cries of the exiles deported to Babylon ring through the ages.

By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept,
When we remembered Zion...
How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?
If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning...
If I set not Jerusalem above my chiefest joy. (Ps. 137: 1, 3–6)

Many are the tunes that have been written to these words. The Early Pioneers of Eretz Yisrael adopted the canon form, but cast the words in a traditional prayer mode

from eastern Europe (i.e. *Ahavoh Rabbah*). It was sung for many years in school and in the community (ex. 1).

One of the most widely known settings is sung at Jewish weddings at the bridal canopy following the traditional breaking of the glass by the bridegroom, as a symbolic act in remembrance of the destruction of Jerusalem (Eliram 2000). Even in a moment of personal joy, the Jewish People remember their past (Hirshberg 2005). It is sung throughout Israel and the Diaspora to this day (ex. 2)

Not only Jews remember. In the Puritan congregations of early 18th century America, these words were sung as a round. In the 1970s the tune resurfaced, popularized in a version sung by the Country and Western singer Don MacLean on his album "American Pie" (ex. 3).

The catastrophe of the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 AD and the dispersion of the Jewish People to the four corners of the earth is documented again and again in our liturgical poetry. However, for two centuries, following the destruction, it was forbidden to sing at all. Gradually the authors of the sacred prayer poems (*piyyutim*) found melodies to their words. These poets living under foreign rule in Palestine and the Diaspora refer to Jerusalem as the Holy City, as a symbol of the Holy Land itself.

In these early poems as well as in the creations of our own time, the powerful longing of the people for their homeland finds expression in the urge to renew the days of yore. The poets of medieval Spain, their hearts aching for Zion, lamented their bitter fate in songs that voiced a vision of Redemption. This longing for Jerusalem found its supreme voice in a group of poems by R. Judah Halevi (1075–1141) known as "Zionides" (ex. 4).

My heart is in the East and I am in the far off West.
How can I find an appetite for food? How can I enjoy it.
How can I fulfill my vows and pledges, While
Zion lies in the fetters of Edom and I am in Arab chains.
It would be easy for me to leave behind all the good things of Spain;
It would be precious to see the dust of the ruined Shrine.
(Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse, edited by T. Carmi, p. 347)

In a heroic act of faith, Halevi the author of the philosophical defense of his faith, "Kuzari," made the dangerous journey to Spain and Egypt. According to legend, he is said to have reached the Holy City. As he leaned down to kiss its stones, a passing Arab horseman trampled him to death as he was reciting his famous lament "Ode to Zion," and sealed his immortality.

This dirge, or "kinot," has entered the liturgy of the Ninth of Av. It is the classic expression for all Jews in exile, reflecting not only the burden of the dispossessed and oppressed, but also the yearning to return. Nurit Hirsch, one of Israel's most popular songwriters, created a Modern Hebrew popular folksong from Halevi's text in the 1960s. It has been sung and arranged again and again (ex. 5).

Zion, will you not ask after the peace of your sons imprisoned in exile.
For they, the remainder of your flock, enquire after you.
From West and East, North and South, from every side.

Accept the greetings of those near and far and the blessings of this captive of desire...
I am like a jackal when I weep for your affliction:
But when I dream of your exiles return, I am a harp for your songs.

Other seekers and pilgrims made their way to Jerusalem, among them the medieval biblical commentator R. Moshe Ben Nahman, "Nachmanides." He conveyed his impressions in a letter written to his family in 1267.

> I am writing you this letter from the holy city of Jerusalem. What can I tell you about the country? Great is the misery and great the ruins... To sum it all up, all that is holy is broken and destroyed more than the rest, and Jerusalem is worse than the rest of the country, and Judea worse and the Galil, and yet with all that devastation – it is still very good. People regularly come to Jerusalem from Damascus and from Aleppo and from all parts of the country to see the Temple and weep over it.

As a result of the Spanish Inquisition, exiles sought safer ports throughout the Mediterranean in North Africa, Italy, Greece, and Turkey. A small group of world-forsaking mystics, the Kabbalists, found refuge in Safed. Their influence on Jewish Liturgy was profound and enduring. Among them were the charismatic young Isaac Luria "the Ari," Moses Cordevero, Joseph Caro, author of the Code of Jewish Law, and the poet R. Shelomo ben Moshe Haim Alkabes (1505–1584).

Alkabes' poem "Lecho Dodi," sung at the welcoming of the Sabbath, became the most famous piyyut of all time. Sung by all the communities of Israel, it has been set to more than 2000 tunes. One of its verses mentions Jerusalem:

Royal sanctuary, God's city and shrine,
Rise from the ruins of thy despair.
Long hast thou dwelt in the vale of woe;
God's loving pity shall crown thy prayer.
(Siddur David de Sola Pool)

Among the many melodies sung today in synagogues throughout Israel and the Diaspora some were forged in the Sephardic (ex. 7) and Ashkenaz communities of Europe (ex. 6). Others are of Hassidic origin (ex.8). One is a contrafact adaptation of an early pioneer song of Eretz Yisrael "Kumi Uri" (ex. 9). One of the creators of the Modern Hebrew Popular-Folk Song (zemer ivri) set the text to an original tune by a composer of the Yishuv born in Jaffo, David Zehavi (1910–1975) (ex.10).

The influence of Spanish Golden Age poets was far-reaching. Many of the writers were skilled Hazzanim and sacred singers. They performed their songs themselves, like modern pop-rock vocalists.

They demonstrated to Jews throughout the Diaspora that Biblical Hebrew could be fashioned into lyric expression. Thoroughly acquainted with Bible, Talmud, Midrash and Halachic literature, they drew abundantly from these sources, weaving a rich tapestry of poetry and song (Almog 2003). Sometimes it was a legend that they retold in verse, extracting a phrase and elaborating upon it, sometimes taking Jewish law and turning it into a lyric.

Their influence was far-reaching. As far away as Yemen, generations were inspired to poetic release of their pent-up religious emotions. Among the greatest of Yemenite poets was the 17th-century Rabbi Shalem Shabazi, a mystic figure legend credits with having "jumped to Jerusalem." His works, and those of dozens of other Yemenite poets, are collected in the "Diwan," a songbook of lyrics still sung by Yemenite Jews

today on the Sabbath, holidays and joyous occasions in homes and synagogues. One of these songs, "Kirya Yefefiya" (ex. 11), a praise to the Holy City, was adopted by the early pioneers of Palestine and has become an Israeli folksong, sung by solo singers and choirs alike.

Beautiful Jerusalem, joy of your cities,
Faithful City to your kings and ministers,
Ever will I recall the loveliness of your colors.
To dwell in your courts has my heart yearned.
Would I could kiss your stones and bless your dust.
Since your sons' dispersion,
My soul has known naught but unrest.

Jerusalem continues to play a central role in the rebirth of the Jewish nation in its ancient homeland. David Ben Gurion, the first prime minister of the State of Israel, said in a speech accepting honorary citizenship:

> Jerusalem is the national capital. It is the historic Jewish capital, the capital of the Hebrew spirit, the eternal capital of Israel. More than anything Jerusalem should be an example to the entire country and the entire nation, an example for all Jewish households in Israel and the Diaspora. Jerusalem itself should be a factor of brotherhood, of cohesion and mutual respect.

The Six Day War reclaimed the Temple Mount and Wailing Wall. The last physical vestiges of ancient Jewish sovereignty in the Holy Land returned to Jewish hands and inspired a burst of creativity. One song, "Hakotel" (ex. 12), gives expression to the meaning of the Wailing Wall for contemporary Israelis.

The Wailing Wall is moss and sadness.
The Wailing Wall is lead and blood.
Some people have a heart of stone.
Some stones have a human heart.
(lyrics: Yossi Gamzu, music: Dov Seltzer)

While such a song echoes popular feelings, it nonetheless draws upon deep traditions. Soon after the war, Rav Zvi Yehudah HaCohen Kook, head of the Merchaz HaRav Yeshivah, delivered the following address:

> From the ends of the earth, from the four corners of the globe, from all the countries of the Diaspora flow the 'prayers of the heart.' To a central point in the land, towards this city, this house. These stones, the remnants of the Temple Mount are for us holy, because they are silent. For the Holy Spirit has never departed from the Western Wall, and the spirit of the living God of Israel, whose name is called from there, has always hovered above them. **These stones are our hearts**.

It is said that there are three Jerusalems. One is the city that people live in today. One is the historic city of Ancient Israel. The third is a heavenly ideal. The Midrash relates:

> "The Jerusalem on earth is nothing, this is not the house of God, that He builds with His own hand," said Jacob. "But if thou sayest that God with His own hands builds Himself a Temple in heaven," replies the Messiah, "know then that with His hands also He will build the Temple on earth." (Louis Ginzberg, Legends of the Jews, p. 492)

The most famous contemporary song about Jerusalem was written a few months before the outbreak of the Six Day War by a young songwriter from Kibbutz Kinneret, Naomi Shemer. "Jerusalem of Gold" (ex. 13) draws its title from a Talmudic reference.

It was the diadem that Rabbi Akiva gave to his wife Rachel as a present. Her refrain combines this Talmudic image with a reference to a line from R. Yehudah Halevi's "Ode to Zion." It sums up succinctly the ties modern Israelis feel for Jerusalem. It is a link that unites generations.

Jerusalem of Gold, of brass and light
For all your songs I am your harp.

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