

THE PASSION OF JERUSALEM

Journey to the Myth

Michal Govrin

## CONTENTS

**Chapter I: The Voyage Out**

- A. The Road
- B. The Deep and The Song of Ascents
- C. The Passion of Jerusalem

**Chapter II: The Journey to the Myth: The Adventures of a Stormy Intimacy**

## A. The Beginnings of Intimacy:

The Choice/the Gaze from Outside/the Stubborn Faith of the Forgotten Female Partner/ “And they will know that I am the Lord” – The Revelation to Moses, to the Nation and the Egyptians/ Blood of the Betrothed/ The Wanderings of the Newlyweds/The Trust

## B. Amelek and the Anti-Semitic Passion

## C. The Ways of Love

The Covenant/The Binding Place – the Empty Space of Yearning/Love’s Offering/Love’s Dwelling

## D. Jerusalem on the Stage of Myth

The Beloved and the Whore/Rift and Consolation

## E. The Woman’s Voice

The Redemption of Love: Ruth/The Responsibility for Being Other: Esther/Hurling Words in the name of Restitution: Lamentations/The Arousal of Desire: the Song of Songs

## F. Longings of Love in the Wake of Destruction and Desertion

The Shock in Myth/Jerusalem, the Site of Longing and Intercourse/The Strength of Human Action/ Direct Transmission

### **Chapter III: The Journey to Jerusalem**

- A. “The Poles – Are Inside Us”: Paul Celan  
Jacques Derrida’s Response
- B. From Jerusalem to Jerusalem: Jacques Derrida  
Instead of Kaddish: First Words before Jacque Derrida’s Grave
- C. “And So Said Jerusalem,” Journal

### **Chapter IV: And Once Again the Myth Shatters on the Rock of Reality**

- A. Jerusalem, Hierusalem, al-Quds
- B. The War Story
- C. Moriah: The Site of the Sacrifice
- D. A Dream

### **Chapter V: The Sabbatical Year in Jerusalem**

- A. The Place of the Pieces – A View from a Summit
  - B. Travels in the Israel Museum  
Zionist Betrothals with the Land/The Rules of the Sabbatical Year/The Sabbatical Year and Zionism/The Israeli Art Wing/The Judaica Wing: Sukkah/The Archeology Wing: Ancient Temples/The Empty Sacredness/The Sabbatical Year in the Land of Israel
  - C. The Sun Wheels Above the Mountain
- Epilogue

Acknowledgements

Sources

## CHAPTER I

## THE VOYAGE OUT

## A. The Road

I made my way to Jerusalem from Tel Aviv, where I was born, in a journey that hasn't ceased ever since. The journey changed in accord with the stations of my life, but no less in accord with the changing face of Jerusalem. I chose to return to the city from Paris, where I'd traveled for my studies. From there, from afar, commenced the pining for Jerusalem. An unexpected inner journey. Longings. But to what? I didn't have the words. Only a memory that washed over everything, of deep shadows in the heart of a summer day. Hard clods of earth, cypress cones, a warm breeze in the pine branches, a deep, intoxicating scent of fig and dry dust. And a deep calm spreading in the body of a young girl. A calm that I hadn't known existed.

On the Tel Aviv shoreline on the eve of my departure I parted from everything that had been part of my life till then. Facing the foam of the waves receding into the depth of the horizon toward what opened, boundless and, for the moment, nameless, I swore to myself: to seek after the "Beyond" rising from the sands and its inexhaustible grains. I swore to seek after it with fingers soaked in the wellspring of existence. I still didn't know what that might be (and will we ever know?) apart from the light, choking feeling that surged like the shuddering of mighty wings from within me. But I knew, even then, that the heights of the Eiffel Tower and the promises of the West of a "Metaphysical shudder," were but way stations on the road.

Mother, who'd survived the holocaust, took me to Jerusalem on the eve of my departure. In the Old City souk, in the midst of celebrating the co-existence, as it were, at the time, we bought an embroidered Palestinian dress. But the heart of her escort was elsewhere. She, the staunch secular Jew, whose God died when her son suffocated to death in Auschwitz, went with me to the Western Wall in order to send me off with a blessing for the journey (years later I'd return to the Western Wall with another staunch secular and believing Jew, but more on the matter in due course). At the time I didn't know how the voyage to Paris would also lead me to the face of Evil, nor how it would lead me to the edge of the Deep in Jerusalem.

During my childhood in Tel Aviv, Father would say dreamily, “Jerusalem ...” and his soft voice reverberated with the familial footsteps of generations who’d arrived in Jerusalem in the twenties from the Ukraine and died before I was born. Grandparents and great-grandparents. Their footsteps echoed in the newly paved streets, leaning on canes in the summer heat, lifting their heads in astonishment, “How is it that we have been so fortunate, from among all the generations, to return to Zion and Jerusalem.” I didn’t imagine back then how I’d find in my grandfather’s black-covered journals, written in the hand of a Torah scholar, the path that would also lead me, decades later, to Jerusalem.

I left for Paris as an Israeli and returned as a Jew. As one of the Jews living in the Diaspora and longing for Zion, like one of the crusaders of the Occident, I too made my pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Upon my return from the City of Lights I chose to live not in Tel Aviv, the “Sexy” city, but in Jerusalem, the heart of Eros. It was the beginning of a voyage toward the locus of desire. A personal journey in which countless traces are impressed.

\*

But the journey to Jerusalem did not end with my arrival in the city. To the contrary. It led to local byways and into the depth of mythic Jerusalem. A journey into its vistas, into the city and its many layers, and a journey that would explore the face of Jerusalem in its writings and beliefs – an archeological tell of words, of images and yearnings, which describe both the terrestrial and the heavenly Jerusalem and rewrite its trials. One journey cutting through the other.

For the journey to Jerusalem is a prolonged expedition in search: “What is Jerusalem?” but also a claim to ask, “Who am I?” What is my own “way” in Jerusalem? Like Paris of the Surrealists and the “Arcades” of Walter Benjamin, like St. Petersburg of the heroes of Dostoevsky or like Kafka’s Prague, Jerusalem sets down in writing its inhabitants and those making their way to the city, and so it is repeatedly written anew in their hands.

It was a journey that began in desire, which didn’t stop ringing changes on me and on the city. And a quest, how to say Jerusalem? As the poet Paul Celan’s own wish: “Say, that Jerusalem *is*.”

## B. The Deep and the Song of Ascents

In the bowels of Mt. Moriah, underneath the Foundation Stone and the place of the altar, yawns open the primordial chasm or Deep [*tehom*], the locus of danger and fecundity. Here is the place of the Tohu Bohu and void, the womb of coming-into-being, the kernel of the forming of the world. The creation, recount the Kabbalists, began in the inner movement of yearning in God, who cast the seed, the accumulated snow under his throne, into the waters of the Deep. In such a fashion the Foundation Stone was formed – at the very onset of gestation – from which the world was carved. Ever since, the Deep crouches in the bottommost depth of Jerusalem, the navel of the universe and the eye of the storm.

According to the Sukkah Tractate, when King David built the Temple and dug a pit under the foundation of the altar (where water and blood washed through a conduit), the Deep crouching at the heart of the mound surged up, brimming over, and threatening to inundate and blot out the world: “Reb Yochanan said: when David dug a pit [*shitin*] the Deep surged up and wished to inundate the world” [Sukkah, page fifty-three, col A].

The Deep and the pit descending into it are described as the female sexual organ, created in Genesis [*Be-re'shit*], together was its pit, like the skilled works of the hand of God, as the word indicates: “*bara* [created] – *shit* [pit].” Depictions of the Deep and the pit are taken from depictions of the female sex in the Song of Songs. “Reb Bar Bar Hannah said that Reb Yochanan said: the pit was created since the six days of creation, as it is said: ‘The roundings of thy thighs are like the links of a chain, the works of the hands of a skilled workman’ [Song of Songs 7:2]. ‘The roundings of thy thighs’ – such is the pit, ‘like links of a chain’ – that delve and descend into the Deep, ‘the works of the hands of a skilled workman’ – this is the skilled work of the Holy Blessed Is He” [Sukkah, page forty-nine, col A]. The Temple too, in a citation steeped in sexuality from the Song of Songs and alluding to the parable of the vineyard, is compared to a tower looming over a vineyard and to a vat carved underneath (resembling the Hindi lingam): “And [he] planted it with the choicest of vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also hewed out a vat therein.” But in building the Temple King David risked touching the sacred. When he digs a pit, or unclogs the ancient pits, he unplugs the mouth of the Deep. The king’s incautious interference in the topography of the sacred site, the hubris of his intrusion into the sacred genitalia, into the chasm of the cosmic, divine womb, bring about a disaster.

At this moment the tale is disrupted. The storyteller, “one who compiles legends,” can’t remember exactly how David succeeded to dam up the overflowing chasm. And only after Reb Hasda asks him again, does he suddenly recall the mysterious end of the story, which seems to surge up from the depth of forgetfulness. “Reb Hasda told him: since you have

reminded me of the thing, this is what happened.” Facing the gushing Deep, David advises to cast into its waters a shard on which is written God’s name, and when the Name dissolves in the water, the Deep will recede and be pacified. Rashi claims that the very same shard is none other than the primordial stopper (or perhaps the hymen) that had plugged up the Deep, and which David removed from its place when cleaning the pit: “David found it covering the opening to the Deep, and it's written it was there since [the (six) days] of creation” (Rashi on the Sukkah Tractate, page 63, col B; and does not the selfsame shard remind us of “The Aleph” stone in which the chronicles of the world are recorded in Borges’s story?).

However, even under such desperate urgency, facing the overflowing Deep, David does not dare resort to such extremes, blotting out the name of God. He seeks approbation. But no one dares speak up. “Is there anyone who knows if it is permitted to write down the Holy name on a shard and to cast it into the Deep and the Deep shall be pacified? No one said a word.” David pledges a curse, He who knows the answer should speak up, otherwise let him choke to death. “And David said: Whoso knows and doesn’t tell me, shall suffocate.” Only then did Architophel respond, and granted David permission to do so (which won’t prevent him from choking to death).

Architophel’s reasoning behind his authorization sheds some light on the nature of the Deep. In doing so he relies on the blotting out of the Name in the water of the bronze basin in the dramatic ritual designed to stop a husband’s fire of envy upon suspecting his deviant wife. The wife pledges her innocence, wherein the name of God, written down on a parchment, is blotted out in the basin water. She is then compelled to drink the water. If she is deviant – her stomach bloats up, and if not, she is cleared of all suspicion and her husband must overcome his jealous rage and take her back. And then “All the more so Architophel spoke his own mind and said: and in reconciling husband and wife [in judging a deviant – *sota* – whose husband suspects that she has slept with another], the Torah states: My name that has been written down in holiness shall be blotted out in water, so too in reconciling the entire world – it is permitted all the more so. He said to David: the thing is permitted.” God’s wrath, manifest in the wrath of the overflowing Deep is compared to the rage of a husband, jealous of his wife’s shame. The erasure of the name of the Name will wash away His wrath and establish peace between worlds.

David casts away the shard on which is written the Tetragrammaton, and the Deep is immediately subdued and retreats to a depth of sixteen thousand cubits. However in doing so the cosmic shakeup has not ended. The sacred Deep, the world’s vulva, is a place of

contraries: it is at one and the same time a threat of imminent catastrophe and the wellspring of existence and fecundity. Its retreat into the depth threatens to rule that the world suffer infertility and drought (like a husband whose envy is subdued, but who abstains from his wife). Such an extreme, supernatural act, of blotting out the Name is not enough to save the world (thousands of years after David, the Maharal of Prague will remove the Living Name from the Golem's brow, which he created by the supernatural powers of the Tetragrammaton. And the Golem will crumble and forever return to dust): in order to perpetuate the existence of the world David must raise the Deep that retreated to the elevation of one thousand cubits, at which height the sacred womb soaks and nourishes the world without destroying it. From now on David must continue to safeguard the womb's pulsations.

And from here on the tale is upended. Ever since human hands released the Deep, neither divine intervention nor the cultic use of the Divine Name will afford it protection. It is now up to mankind's own deeds, the strength of his prayer and the use of language, to readjust the cosmic balance, which he violated. Henceforth man is responsible for the Deep of the world and its calibration. Consequently, in order to raise the water fifteen thousand cubits to the proper height of fertility, David composes the fifteen Psalms opening with the words "The Song of Ascents" (120-134). The Songs of Ascents, steeped in breathtaking descriptions of Jerusalem, David utters as daily words of extolment, delivered as though he were thrumming the strings of a cosmic harp. And in doing so he once again raises, once again awakens the sacred womb that had retreated, so that its waters water the world without overflowing and causing its wholesale destruction.

David's foundational act was turned at the time of the Second Temple into a ritual during *Simchat Beit Hasboeva* (Rejoicing of the Water-drawing) at the end of Sukkot, the Festival of Booths. The height of the ceremony of the Pouring of the Water on the alter, water which had been drawn from the Gihon spring, the only source of water in Jerusalem, lying on the margins of the desert, and whose waters gush feebly. The pouring of water accompanies the prayer for rain, in a country threatened by drought and in dire need of the mercy of the heavens to release its rains. On the eastern slopes of the Temple Mount, on the fifteen round, wide steps descending from the Court of the Women and leading to the Valley of Jehoshaphat and the Gihon spring, the High Priests and the Levites, according to the detailed description in the Talmud, would pray and sing before the nation – accompanied by numerous instruments – the fifteen Songs of Ascents that David sang to the Deep.



\*

According to myth a dangerous Deep lurks under the foundations of many cities around the world. There was, for the example, the ancient, Greek threat of the Minotaur, trapped in the labyrinth in the depth of Knossos, devouring every year the handsomest of the young men or women, sacrificed in order to appease the Minotaur's appetite. And in another myth, from the Middle Ages, a dragon spread its terror in the depth of the city of Krakow. Ariadne's wisdom and Theseus' courage defeated the Minotaur, and prince Krakus slayed the dragon. But on Mt. Moriah, where a lamb took Isaac's place, and human sacrifice was abolished, the way to restrain danger no longer required human sacrifice. But even a primeval and singular miraculous act will not keep in check the danger. In Jerusalem relations with the sacred, for all appearance both merciful and dangerous, has not ended. For generations the responsibility for such a relationship has fallen on man. This is his freedom and his burden. The power of prayer and of the word, the power of his deeds, descends into the pit and pierces the Deep. They safeguard the sacred, the wellspring of passion and fecundity, and they will bring about either wholesale destruction or a living vitality.

### C. The Passion of Jerusalem

Arriving in Jerusalem, toward the end of the seventies, there still lingered memories of the British Mandate days and the siege during the War of Independence as well as a certain nostalgia for the small, divided township of old, between '48 and '67, with no-man's-land at its heart, an intellectual and bohemian city – on its secular side. In the seventies, the ecstasy of Six-Day War victory could still be felt everywhere and the development of the

city was at its peak. Jerusalem was a cosmopolitan city, a magnet for artists and scholars, teeming with culture, broad-minded. Or so it appeared at first glance. Wandering between its mysteries while shopping in the Old City souk, or wine tasting in the Beit Jala monastery, and winding up at midnight with a pitta and egg in the bakery hard by Damascus Gate. The city fanned out between leafy streets and winding lanes opening onto sudden vistas; between Hassidic courtyards, the cry of the muezzin, and the tolling of church bells; between dry fruit and herb stalls in East Jerusalem and the bookshelves of the National Library in the Western part of the city; between nights in the souk packed with the young gyrating and drinking in the clubs. Everyday and festive Jerusalem; Jerusalem of those driving to work on the congested roads and others rushing off in the hush of twilight to Sabbath Eve prayers, or to the Western Wall on the eve of Shavuot, the Feast of Weeks; Jerusalem of the long processions of Christian pilgrims and of Muslims ascending to al-Aqsa for Friday prayers.

But behind the quiet, or the blindness, tensions swelled. Toward the end of the eighties the first Intifada erupted. The Oslo Agreements and the formation of the Palestinian Authority did not ease the tension, and by the end of the first year of the Millennium the al-Aqsa Intifada broke out, with Jerusalem as its rallying call. The fire that ignited on the Temple Mount, on Haram a-Sharif, exploded in cafes and in buses and in blood-soaked attacks all over the country. These were days of blood and hatred in Jerusalem. The very same byways of the souk, which only yesterday had been teeming with people now stood deserted, and in place of the flags of the Millennium that had flown above its towers on the Pope's visit, there remained a city shrouded in fear and silence, a city that "*does sit solitary*" (Lamentations 1:1). Her erstwhile lovers abandoned the city with the hate of the mortified by passion, mocking "*at her desolation*" (ibid 1:7). And even when some of the festive atmosphere returned to its streets, the rifts between its inhabitants didn't disappear, contrary to all the proclamations of a united city. The gaps in the social fabric of the city remained, and the civic or artistic efforts to mend the rends were limited in scope. Once again Jerusalem stood as the navel of the world: though not as creation's womb, but rather as a blood-splattered arena on which were fought the rights of ownership. From within the chasm of myth ancient, spiteful rivalries erupted in the guise of nationalism and terror.

Such has been the tumultuous fate of Jerusalem, in which everyday reality is bound up with its representation in myth. Its fate has been the upshot of a national struggle, an armed conflict and heated, national debates, but it has been no less the result of a religious myth lurking deep within its epicenter. Without underestimating the importance of the national,

territorial and economic dimensions of the conflict over Jerusalem, the effort (with all good intentions) to repress its religio-mythic roots (no matter how threatening they may be), only magnifies the tragic blindness, and is not unlike ignoring the prophecy heralding the birth of Oedipus – doomed to slay his father and marry his mother – which precedes the plague in Thebes at the opening of *Oedipus Rex*, and by doing so abandoning any chance of recognition (*anagnorisis*) or resolution, or hope of catharsis. The latter are only facilitated thanks to the uncovering of the roots of the tragedy and the resolution of the events, on and offstage.

“The return of the repressed:” Zionism and the Return to Zion (a unique event in the history of mankind) and the creation of the State of Israel in the 20<sup>th</sup>-century as a Jewish nation state established – for the first time in history – Jerusalem as the heart of the theater of strife between the three Abrahamic religions. However, the division between the monotheistic religions yearning for Jerusalem and staking their exclusive claim, each according to its faith, has not been properly acknowledged. The discussion of the mythic dimensions of Jerusalem has been left in the margins.

\*

“Myth” is Greek for story, for the most part a story dealing with sublime events, deeds undertaken by heroes and gods in ancient times,” in Yehuda Liebes’s words.<sup>1</sup> Myth is the creation of man, applying language as an instrument of human expression. Hesiod, author of the ancient book on Greek mythology, receives the “Book of the Chronicles of the Gods,” from the Muses, who compiled the tales of the Gods and the cosmos, and handed it down to mortals in the tongue of human kind. Moses too “received the Torah from Sinai” and had it not been delivered, carved in the language of mortals, it would not have been revealed. Myth expresses the covert feelings of society as expressed in its own words. It defines its own awareness and establishes its consolidation, and is liable to alter as times and events change, though without removing all traces of its earlier layers. Myth is a culture’s archive of memory. Earlier stories and events remain dormant so long as they haven’t been struck dumb by circumstances. At the proper time, convulsions occurring in

---

<sup>1</sup> Yehuda Liebes, *Tales of the Gods: The Jewish Myth, Essays and Research* (Carmel, 2009). My discussion of myth and its erotic aspects are indebted to Gershom Scholem, Yehuda Liebes, Moshe Idel and the writings of their colleagues and students, as listed in the bibliography at the end of the book.

the present awaken forgotten voices from within the myth's depth. They then surface and hover freshly resonant, and nourish the writing of its new chapters.

Passion lies at the heart of the Jerusalem myth – Divine and human as one. In all its facets and names and all of its traditions, Jerusalem is seen as a feminine figure, and the passion evinced toward her is portrayed as that of a man's lust for a woman. The book's journey has set out on its tracks. The roots of the passion are imbedded in language and in the landscape. In verses from Psalms God, choosing Zion as his dwelling place, establishes His passion toward her, "For the Lord hath chosen Zion, He has desired it for His habitation (132: 13)." And switching to the first person God declares His desire to find in her eternal rest: "This is My resting-place for ever; here will I dwell; for I have desired it." All of the myth's underlying elements are already set in place here: the male choice of a beloved, and the desire to dwell within her in peace. And so too in "Idra Zuta" in the Zohar, the conclusion of the mystical journey leads to Zion, the Lord's dwelling-place, to the female sexual organ:

All of the male's desire for the female [...] to the place called Zion  
 For there is the site of female covering like a woman's womb  
 [...as] is written, "For the Lord has chosen Zion 'He has desired for his habitation'  
 (The Zohar, Idra Zuta)

God's passion, which has apparently been depicted in the Jewish tradition in considerable erotic detail, has turned into a model for emulation (*imitatio dei*) for all those who later long for Jerusalem, whether in spirit or by the strength of arms. In whatever mode throbs the longing to dwell in Jerusalem, and to say, "This is my resting-place for ever."

However, as it appears in our journey, mythic Jerusalem is multifaceted, and God's passion too is comprised of Eros's many faces. It is not only the drive to conquer and possess the city, but also the longing to let up her hold and to rest in her bosom. In the depth of God's passion for Jerusalem may be found the intimate expression of the polar extremes of male desire: the desire to lie in the lap of the beloved and the yearning for the lap of the mother.

At the heart of mythic Jerusalem, passion is upended: often from longing to disappointment, and from love to violent jealousy. But at times, as in passages from Psalms, the male desire is replaced by longing for repose, and during moments of crisis the feminine figure, a beloved and mother, hastens redemption. Ideal love of the Jewish myth

is constantly renewed, as are mutual yearnings: desire, which leaves at its heart an empty space between the lovers. Jerusalem, “The passion of Jerusalem,” as we shall later see, is also revealed as that of the Sabbath and the rest of Sabbath.

\*

The passion of Jerusalem erupts as well from the jolt of its sweeping vistas. In his book *Language and Myth* Ernst Cassirer describes how a cry of astonishment bursts forth in the face of uncommon natural phenomena. The spontaneous utterance turns into the name of the phenomena around which is woven a figure and myth. So too traces of its landscape are imprinted in the feminine figure of Jerusalem.

The entry into Jerusalem, from all the roads leading into the city, creates a route of expectation in arriving to an elevated place whose summit reached the heaven. The road ascends until it seems there is no end to the ascent, and the longer the ascent continues so too grows the longing for what will be revealed, surely, at its height. But then, surprisingly, upon arrival, the sight is reversed, and alongside it the passion. For how great is the astonishment when instead of an elevated mountain enveloped in sacredness bursts into view a valley surrounded by hills as described in Psalms: “As the mountains are round about Jerusalem (125: 2)” And from the top of one of the hills encircling it is revealed at its center a low mound. Contrary to “The topography of longing” a small salience stands out, hidden and scarred, surrounded by a deep ring of gullies and valleys, resembling the vulva. At which point erupts the other passion, to possess the city, to conquer it, to be its master. As though possible.

But Jerusalem eludes the stereotype of passion, whether in terms of its scenery or its myth. She is a city-woman gifted by the secret of contraries: an elevated place in which a chasm lies in its depth; a holy city bereft of a source of water, save for a feebly gushing spring; she is dependent on the mercies of the heavens while at the same time the source of creation. The feminine, many-faceted figure of Jerusalem is an ungraspable and uncontainable object of desire.

Hence from days of old Jerusalem has turned aside from the notion of single ownership. From its inception the holy site was so for a multitude of believers. Melchizedek, its first priest-king, personified in his image and name (King of Justice) the early union of justice and faith in a God Most High, as depicted in his encounter with Abraham: “And King Melchizedek of Salem brought out bread and wine, he was a priest

of God Most High” (Genesis 14: 18), and perhaps in the hope of bringing together the pieces [*betarim*], he named it “Salem”: whole. Abraham himself will return to Mt. Moriah, led by the God “And he set out for the place of which God had told him” (Genesis 22: 3) to offer his son Isaac as a burnt offering. And when the blade that was raised wasn’t lowered, and a ram replaced Isaac, Abraham then designated the site by a name filled with hope, “*Yireh*”: “And Abraham named the site Adonai-yireh, whence the present saying, ‘On the mount of the Lord there is vision’” (Genesis 22:14; Bereshit Rabba, Parashat Yireh, 56). Ever since the name of Jerusalem is divided: Yireh-salem. Its Jebusite name “Salem” and Abraham’s suffix Yireh. From the start its name is the union of two beliefs directed toward one place, bringing together realities and yearnings. So too in the aftermath of the conquest of Jerusalem by David and its establishment as the capital of the Kingdom of Judah, Jerusalem will stay outside the limits of Judah and Benjamin inheritances, refusing to be under the exclusive rule of any one tribe.

\*

How will Jerusalem be portrayed in the early decades of the 21<sup>st</sup>-century, after the trauma of the Shoah and the establishment of the State of Israel? What will be her status in the heart of the three monotheistic religions, coming together in Jerusalem? The responsibility for the image of Jerusalem – in reality and in myth as one – is placed today, first and foremost, on Judaism, which bestowed her holy foundation, and returned to her as a sovereign.

The Zionist vision, which at its onset clasped a mattock and changed reality, was unable to listen to all the voices of the myth. In the hope of returning to the Land of Israel and to Jerusalem after two thousand years of subjugation the urgent demand throbbed to found a nation. Other voices remained in the depth of memory without affecting and grappling with the complicated reality. The book’s journey will attend to voices close at hand, and will also lead to the archeological tell of myth. The diggers’ headlamp will reveal forgotten voices in the depth of mythic memory, and will light up certain aspects of Jerusalem, which haven’t been shaken of their dust, and haven’t been placed in the center of Israeli culture. The resonance of these ancient voices gives rise to a number of unsettling questions in the light of today’s reality. Although the journey will be undertaken largely from the vantage point of the Jewish heritage, I hope that as a result of the mutual diffusion between the three religions, the new face of Jerusalem will also resonate in the others.

The spirit of a manifesto resounds in the book, though it is not my intention to apply the tone of persuasion common to the heated rhetoric of prophecy. This is not a *cri de coeur* to destroy the old and replace it with the new, or alternately to turn back in time, but rather a fundamental and radical step (in the literal sense of the Latin root, *radix*, that is root). This is a journey to a fundamental and rooted renewal.

Jerusalem, the eye of the storm in the global inter-religious struggle, is a unique laboratory for changing the set of relations between the three monotheistic religions. The myth of God's cohabitation with His chosen beloved, and His passion for Jerusalem, His female spouse, has shaped the history of the Jewish nation and determined the fate of Jerusalem in Jewish, Christian and Muslim traditions. And it still affects the attitude to Jerusalem, the site of choice, in the struggle taking place over her today. Any change in attitude to the city will require a radical change in terms of the passion toward her. And this touches upon the fundamental relation between the sexes, and in deeply rooted notions of femininity and masculinity, which are cast in new light here too.

A moderating change in desire toward the locus of holiness may also serve to convert – as happened in the case of David's deed – the Deep lying under Jerusalem from a threat of annihilation, into a source of fecundity and life.

\*

Different paths of the journey lead in the book to Jerusalem. They differ one from the other in terms of subject matter and range, and apply a number of genres: interpretation, history, memoir, or poetry. One path reflects the many-faceted figure of Jerusalem in the myth of intimacy between God and the Jewish nation. Pilgrims describe their encounter with Jerusalem on another route. A third traverses the charged entanglement between myth and reality in the struggle between the three faiths in Jerusalem. And yet a fourth journey leads toward the prospect of applying the Jewish law of the Sabbatical Year and rest to the love of Jerusalem.

The journey to the myth will follow closely after the intimate relationship between God and His chosen consort, the Jewish Nation in the guise of the Daughter of Zion and Jerusalem. It is a tempestuous intimacy, vacillating between loyalty and betrayal, moments of elation and periods of separation and abandonment. Such intimacy underwent dramatic changes, but nonetheless abides in a variety of forms across all the critical phases of history for over three thousand years. Our journey will begin in the wake of the electing of the

Fathers in the intimate covenant laid down between God and the nation of the sons of Israel in Egypt. The complex relationship develops during the exodus out of subjugation and into exile, as attested at Mt. Sinai. And the details of the covenant are defined in the context of the upheavals in the couple's forty-year errancy in the desert. At that time the unique space of the dwelling of love, the Tabernacle, is also given shape. After the nation entered the land and following David's conquest of Jerusalem, the daughter of Zion attires herself in the feminine figure of the chosen beloved in the intimate relationship. However, her relations with her lover run aground. Through the voices of the prophets God rebukes his spouse who betrays him; the voice of the accused woman is silenced, and God, her erstwhile love, wrecks on her havoc and destruction. Only in the Books of *Ruth*, *Esther* and *Lamentations*, and in the prophecies of consolation, erupts the voice of His spouse, actively safeguarding their intimacy in moments of distress. And in the *Song of Songs* their mutual love is revealed at the height of its power.

With the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans and the dispersion of the People, the relations between the lovers come to a head. The myth is deeply shaken but its terms and wording continue, even as it undergoes radical changes in the proliferation of new Halachic laws and legends. In spite of the loss of sovereignty, the destruction of the locus of the bonding with God, and hundreds of years of exile, the myth's preservation assured the existence of the Jewish People. It went on spinning the tale's web, which was in danger of tearing.

God's absence following the destruction is a frightful though refuted secret in the Jewish psyche. On the one hand it is described from the very onset in no uncertain terms, and yet God is appealed to with such renewed vigor that one might say – paraphrasing *Ahad Ha'am* in reverse (“Rather than Israel preserving the Sabbath – the Sabbath has preserved them”) – rather than the Holy-One-Blessed-Be-He safeguarding Israel, they have safeguarded and borne Him along, capricious and hot-tempered, on all their journeys, even as they went on pleading for His mercy. However, from now on a new feminine figure has been added to the myth of intimacy. She stands and contends between the two. Her heavenly and earthly features are manifold: the Shechina, the Sabbath, the Torah, Knesset Yisrael, and Jerusalem. Her suffering and destruction embody the suffering of the nation, and the hope for her redemption and the renewal of her union with God in the place of passion, in Jerusalem, is also the redemptive hope of the nation.

From the very beginning relations between God and His chosen spouse aren't conducted behind locked doors. God's passion, the exclusive, male desire for his only and



chosen beloved – the Nation of Israel and Jerusalem – occurs in plain view before other nations: the “Others”, the excluded. The public intimacy incites their jealousy and is experienced as an existential threat and as a provocation. It arouses feelings of hatred and destructive impulses. But at the same time, the other nations’ gaze is essential to the marshaling of God’s identity, as well as that of his chosen nation, and for the existence of their unique covenant. The fatal “Triangle of passion” accompanies the Jewish narrative from its inception. “The shadow of anti-Semitism” is the unavoidable outcome of the choice and the covenant. The myth of intimacy between God and his elect, from all its different aspects, exerts influence on the relations between the people of Israel and other nations to this day, and is a provoking factor vis-à-vis Jerusalem.

To the mythic depictions of Jerusalem are joined the reports of pilgrims over the centuries. Personal confessions. Journeys across physical and mental landscapes. Our journey will accompany two Jewish Diasporic writers who in effect experienced, each in his own way, the possibility of reaching Jerusalem and *saying* her. The poet Paul Celan, holocaust survivor who wrote in German, visited Jerusalem a few months before his death. In the cycle of poems he wrote in the wake of his visit he marks out a route circling and passing round the holy site, groping for a way to open what has been shut and dangerous. He points to another possibility of love for Jerusalem, not possessive, but rather immersive, like in sleep. And in light of the sober knowledge that in Jerusalem “The Poles/ are inside us” as in one of his poems to which I will return, Celan reminds us that to be in Jerusalem means to say her, “Say, that Jerusalem *is*.” Celan’s poems were for me a form of succor even in the most difficult of times.

With Celan’s words resonating between us, I accompanied Jacques Derrida in Jerusalem on his own route that wound midway between his and my Jerusalem. It was a walk “From Jerusalem to Jerusalem,” as he inscribed his book to me. A route that led to a personal confession that began in his childhood in Algeria, touched on deconstruction and broached his looming death. The conversation with Derrida extended over a quarter of a century, during years of relative quiet in Jerusalem and others of violence in its streets, and always out of a common love for Jerusalem, and the conscious acknowledgement of how myth writes out – inscribes – its own fate.

Alongside the eruption of violence at the onset of the 21<sup>st</sup>-century, the voice of Jerusalem, as a woman, emerged from within me. The journal recording my work-in-progress as I prepared my collection of poems *And So Said Jerusalem: Poems and Hymns*,

crisscrossed the landscape, streets, lanes, the fateful times, and the resounding of ancient voices.

Reflecting on the charged encounter between myth and reality in Jerusalem became all the more urgent during the al-Aqsa Intifada, when the dangerous merging of the yearning after Jerusalem and the sacredness of sacrifice exploded. On the selfsame arena, on the same mound ringed by valleys and mountains, the foundational stories of Judaism, Christianity and Islam have taken place. Jesus delivers his sermons in the Temple and bears his cross from station to station on Via Dolorosa and further to Golgotha. And Muhammad, mounted on his horse Buraq, extends his night journey as far as the far Mosque, al-Aqsa. Each religion perceives itself as the Lord's true and only choice. Each one longs after the same city and the beloved in its own unique, monotheistic and male fashion, toward the same brazen holy place, Jerusalem, Hierusalem, al-Quds. And on Mount Moriah, the site of the Sacrifice, the urge to reenact the sacred victim is revealed as well. Its return, in the absence of the ancient restraint, accompanies the conflict in the renewed three-ringed arena.

The longing to find peace of mind in Jerusalem at the height of hostilities has led to a voice forgotten in the archeological tell of the myth: the *Sabbatical Year*. Set free a journey to the sources, gazing at the bisected panorama viewed from the Hill of Evil Counsel, and a tour through the wings of the Israel Museum, displaying the moving remnants of the ancient Jewish communities in the Land of Israel in the aftermath of the destruction of the Temple, were all a reminder of just how Jerusalem defies being properly grasped or possessed. In the face of the Zionist redemption of Israel and the Israeli political reality, it has become clearer how timely may be the moral horizon of *shmitah*, as “conditional” ownership, and the removal of proprietary barriers every seven years. And of just how radical the Sabbatical and the Jubilee Year are in instantiating the Sacred and the Name of the Lord in the world, acknowledging that “the world is contained in God, and not God in the world (Bereshit Rabba, Parashat Vayetze, 11).

\*

Is it possible to initiate the Sabbatical Year in Jerusalem, to yearn for Zion even as one releases one's grip? Is this the secret of one's passion for her? And how to long for Jerusalem even while dwelling within her perimeters? And can Jerusalem ever be a coveted beloved as well as the lap of a merciful mother, not merely the object of jealous love, but

rather a city and a mother embracing all her sons? Will the children of Abraham, struggling over his legacy, enjoy her love and find peace in the bosom of a loving mother, in the absence of the rivalry and jealousy of brothers ignite a war in their midst? For a mother's love is the only one that doesn't inflame a war between brothers. Will Jerusalem be a mother to all her offspring and dreamers, the lap of rest and nest of their distant prayers?

Is it possible as such to dream Jerusalem? To dream ... such an intimate aspect of existence in Jerusalem, a close-guarded recipe of her deep taste, which Yotam Ottolenghi and Sami Tamimi describe so well in their co-authored cookbook entitled *Jerusalem*: "The diversity and richness of Jerusalem, both in terms of the cooks and their disparate backgrounds and the ingredients they use, make it fascinating to any outsider ... Four thousand years of intense political and religious wrangling are impossible to hide ... The other, more positive side of this coin is that the inherent passion and energy that Jerusalemites have in abundance results in some fantastic food and culinary creativity." Many are those who long for Jerusalem: not only the members of the three faiths, but also different currents within Judaism itself, squabbling amongst themselves to hold sway over the sacred place. Will each of them be able to sit in the kitchen redolent with mother's fragrances, and delight in the scents of all the longed for dishes of their heart's content?

\*

Upon my arrival in Jerusalem, its scholars and dreamers welcomed me into their homes. Over the years generations of intellectuals, learned women and men, joined them, alongside artists, and poets, and writers, painters, and people involved in the theater who chose to live in Jerusalem, or who made a pilgrimage, and each one set out through her, following his or her own path on a journey of creation. My studies deepened with my husband and daughters. This is the company who enabled me to write and direct, to dare and to dream, in days of peace and of war. Echoes of this wholly inspiring conversation accompany the book of the journey to Jerusalem.

Over the years I have been carried away by the urge to say Jerusalem, to let her voice resound in every possible manner of artistic expression. In poems and short stories, in theater and in novels, such as *The Name*, in which the protagonist identifies body and soul with the Shechina and with Jerusalem, writing feverishly at night, the Jerusalem syndrome never absent, as too the longing for the Name; or the novel *Snapshots*, wherein the principle female character, an architect, plans a monument to peace on "Mount Sabbatical" in Jerusalem; and finally in my collection of poems *And So Said Jerusalem*. The enquiries in the

book complemented the creative processes, and developed from within them. All are entwined in a personal journey to Jerusalem, a “Travelogue,” immersed in time and place.

And all around a city and its dailliness. A life of routine, and days of a teeming city; a focal point for endless rambles of unending revelations. I accompanied my daughters in the streets of Jerusalem to their kindergarten and school, and made my way up in my car to the Mt. Scopus campus or drove west to the slopes of Ein Karem. And always, from the far side of the tumultuous years and events, there remained a young girl’s memory of pure joy, saturated with pinesap and hot dust in the deep shadows of a summer day. The sudden, awakening precipitation at dusk, when the vast rustling hum of Jerusalem opens, and in the light of the sunset there erupts unforeseen, at the top of Keren HaYesod Street, on the distant horizon above the traffic light and beyond the homes of Abu Tor, the chasm of the Dead Sea, and above it hover the hills of Moab. And the fragile beauty washes over me like hope.

Translated by Gabriel Levin