

Jerusalem 2050 Visionaries Conference
MIT, April 2005

Jerusalem – the Holy City, a City of God, the City of Justice, the Faithful City, the City of Peace. A city surrounded by hills on which the Shehina herself appears to rest. A city of stone that glows pink and gold in the sunset. Oh, what a beautiful city!

A divine city that inspires madness, the Jerusalem Syndrome, which causes mere mortals to believe themselves to be the Messiah, the Redeemer.

Tall, gaunt, bearded men stalk its alleys, eyes blazing with fanatic zeal. They might easily have served as inspiration for Samuel Taylor Coleridge:

And all should cry, Beware! Beware!

His flashing eyes, his floating hair!

Weave a circle round him thrice,

And close your eyes with holy dread,

For he on honeydew hath fed

And drunk the milk of Paradise.

Half a century ago there was a woman who roamed the streets handing out broadsheets and uttering prophetic cries that recalled the unfathomable writings of William Blake. People called her – perhaps she called herself – Keshet l'Ehad, the Connection with the One, meaning God. If you did not stop to hear her out, she blasted you with rhyming, rhythmic execrations – Tipesh Katan! Hamor Lavan! – Little fool, white ass.

Madmen plot to set fire to the mosques on Mt. Moriah, the Temple Mount, Baht Majgid El-Aksa, in order to precipitate the wars of Gog and Magog, Armageddon, which will in turn *compel* God to begin all over again and, ultimately, bring the Messiah. Politicians promenade there uninvited, perhaps with similar, but more diabolical, intentions.

Black-clad yeshiva students scuttle through its streets, always, it seems, in a hurry, never loitering. Some of them are studying how to conduct animal sacrifices once the Temple is rebuilt. Alongside them, seemingly less in haste, are monks and nuns, each in the habit of his or her order.

But if you sit at sunset on the verandah of the Jerusalem Cinemathèque, facing the walls of the Old City, the Tower of David, the Church of the Dormition, from which the Virgin Mary is said to have ascended to Heaven, you can hear the church bells sweetly calling to Vespers and the muezzin summoning the faithful to prayer. Paradoxically, below the Cinemathèque, in what was for twenty years a No Man's Land sprinkled with landmines that occasionally, mysteriously, exploded, unprovoked by any visible human presence, lies Gai Hinnom, where infants were believed to have been sacrificed to Moloch, the place that Jews designate as Hell itself. While if you stand on Jerusalem's highest mountain, Scopus, the lookout point, facing west, you see what Jews call the Temple Mount and on it, the Dome of the Rock, gleaming gold; below it, set in the eastern side of the retaining walls is the Golden Gate, the Gate of Mercy, through which the Messiah will ride and, with him (or her?), all the resurrected dead buried on the Mount of Olives that faces the gate. Jerusalem will be the site of the Last Judgment.

"The air in Jerusalem," wrote Yehuda Amichai, perhaps its greatest singer since King David, "is saturated with prayers and dreams."

Jerusalem is indeed a holy city, a city of God, sacred to three great monotheistic religions. That is its greatness; that is its tragedy. Its Hebrew name incorporates the word Shalom, peace; its Greek name, Hierosolyma, reflects its holiness (*hieros*), as does the Arabic, Al-Quds. Yet for centuries this city has been not only a scene of fierce battle and bloodshed, but a *casus belli*. David conquered it and made it his capital; Solomon built a temple and made it a religious centre; Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, burnt it to the ground and exiled most of its inhabitants; the Seleucids conquered it; the Maccabeans rebuilt the altar; megalomaniac Herod, the master builder, erected a gorgeous, elegant, grandiose city in which the Second Temple glittered with gold and white marble “like a snow-covered mountain.” Jesus entered it and was crucified there. The Romans destroyed it in 70 C.E. and it lay in ruins for over sixty years. Hadrian converted it into Aelia Capitolina, named for the Capitoline triad, Jupiter, Juno and Minerva, and built the Temple of Jupiter in the Temple area. In 324 Constantine converted Jerusalem into a Christian city and banished its Jews. The Church of the Holy Sepulchre, built on the site where the True Cross was found (and where a temple to Venus had previously stood), a mere ¼ of a mile from the Temple Mount, became the latter’s Christian counterpoise. In

614 the Persians destroyed the churches and handed the city over to the Jews. In 638, the city surrendered to Muslim forces and in the 7th century Islam's holy places, the Al-Aqsa (Outer Heaven) mosque and the Dome of the Rock, Omar's mosque, were built where Mohammed had rested on his Night Journey—on the mount where once the Temple had stood, the mount under which lies Even ha-Shetiya, on which the world was believed to have been founded and Noah's Ark came to rest, and which was also Mt. Moriah, where Abraham, patriarch of both Judaism and Islam, almost sacrificed his son Isaac – or was it Ishmael? In 1099 the Christian Crusaders ransacked the city, wading knee-deep in the blood of both Jews and Muslims. When Saladin conquered the city almost one hundred years later, no Christians were allowed to live there. Later they were allowed to return, but the Jews continued to be excluded. In 1244, the Turks sacked the city and massacred the Christians. Gradually, the city changed; under four centuries of Ottoman rule, from 1517-1917, both the Jewish and Muslim communities grew and were active. By the time the British arrived in 1917 the city was a conglomerate of districts or neighborhoods, each with its own character and most of them with a fairly, but not totally, homogeneous

population. In the Old City, these included the Jewish Quarter, the Armenian Quarter, the Christian Quarter, the Muslim Quarter, a small Moorish Quarter and so on.

Outside the Old City walls were, inter alia, a German Colony built by the Templars, an American Colony, a Greek Colony, an Italian Colony. The Jews spread out to the west and south; the Arabs to the north and east of the Old City. There are at present virtually no neighborhoods with a mixed population of Jews and Arabs, though some are in very close proximity, on occasion, since 1967 (before which a wall separated them), even sharing one and the same street, but at opposite ends. In addition to this separation, Arabs and Jews have their own internal divisions. Ultra-Orthodox Jews do not live in the same districts as secular Jews; Christians and Muslim Arabs tend to live apart. Every district has its own synagogues, mosques or churches.

When the British mandatory authorities appointed a municipal council, they based representation on *religious* identity; it comprised two Muslims, two Christians and two Jews. From 1924 on, this became an elected body, with four members from each community, a Muslim mayor and two deputy mayors, one Jewish and one Christian (this, despite the fact that Jews constituted a clear majority of tax payers). Ten years later, the

city was divided into twelve constituencies, six Arab and six Jewish, each electing one councilor. Other bodies dealt with issues relating specifically to the respective religions and communities – for example, the Chief Rabbinate and Va’ad Leumi (National Council) among the Jewish population, the Muslim Supreme Court and the Higher Arab Committee among the Arab population.

In November 1947, when the United Nations voted in favour of a partition of Palestine into two states, it acknowledged the uniqueness of Jerusalem by excluding it from both states, instead suggesting that the city become a “corpus separatum,” an international city under UN trusteeship. While the Jews reluctantly accepted the partition plan, the Arabs did not. The war of 1948-9 effectively and tragically divided the city and only in 1967 was it reunited, at least formally, de jure, if not in human terms, de facto. Upon entering what had been the Jewish Quarter, Israelis discovered that its houses had been razed to the ground and its numerous synagogues wholly or partly destroyed, but no attempt had been made to build in the area. Like the Sleeping Beauty it had been comatose till revived by the heroic prince who had penetrated the metaphorical thickets that surrounded it.

I cite this lengthy history for two reasons: first, in order to demonstrate the extent to which conflicts inspired (if that is the right word) by Jerusalem centred around religion and the city's sacredness for each one of the three monotheistic religions. It is a city like no other. Neither its strategic position nor a wealth of natural resources arouses the ardent desire and determination to conquer and exert sovereignty over it.

Jerusalem remained a focal point of Jewish religion, Jewish practice and Jewish yearning throughout two millennia of exile. Weeping by the waters of Babylon after the destruction of the First Temple, the Jewish captives vowed "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither, let my tongue stick to my palate if I cease to think of you, if I do not keep Jerusalem in memory, even at my happiest hour." Today, those words are sung at Jewish weddings all over the world, immediately after the groom has trampled a glass to smithereens, in memory of the destruction of the Temple. Thrice daily, when Jews recite the central prayer of their liturgy, the eighteen blessings, they face Jerusalem. Two of those blessings are relevant to our topic: First,

And to Jerusalem, thy city, return in mercy, and dwell therein
as thou hast spoken ; rebuild it soon in our days as an

everlasting building, and speedily set up therein the throne
of David. Blessed art thou, O Lord, who rebuildest
Jerusalem.

And second,

And let our eyes behold Thy return in mercy to Zion.
Blessed art thou, O Lord, who restorest thy divine
presence unto Zion

When Naftali Zvi Imber wrote *Hatikvah*, The Hope, dated Jerusalem 1884, the poem which became the anthem of Zionism and later of the State of Israel, the ultimate hope was “to be a free people in our land, the land of Zion, Jerusalem!” Indeed, the very name of the Jewish nationalist movement – Zionism – was based on one of the names of Jerusalem and Imber’s words still resound, with secular Jews as much as with the religiously observant.

I also referred to the British model of municipal government because I believe it can serve as a possible model for peaceful co-existence, a solution which, if accepted and executed in a spirit of mutual tolerance and good will, with respect for the beliefs of “the

other” and a readiness to forgo exclusive sovereignty in favour of constructive collaboration might finally put an end to the enduring conflict. In fact, the UN resolution of 1947 got it right when it proposed that Jerusalem be a separate entity, but this should not be under UN trusteeship, any more than the Vatican is. In fact, the Vatican’s autonomy could well be our model. As autonomous as a sovereign state, it enjoys full representation at the United Nations and at international conferences. It has its own police force, its own flag.

Jerusalem is still comprised of neighbourhoods that are fairly homogeneous in terms of ethnic origin and background, countries of origin, religious practice – differences that find expression not only in language but even in nuances of dress or even culinary preferences. It would not be difficult to establish twelve (or, if necessary, even more) constituencies, each of which would – like the five boroughs of Greater New York or the more numerous boroughs of the old Greater London County Council – be autonomous and responsible for certain aspects of the lives of its residents, such as the location of shopping facilities, provision and maintenance of facilities for cultural and

sports activities, and also provision of places of worship and other services, such as ritual baths, which the religiously observant require.

To a certain extent, this kind of local autonomy has already been created via the neighborhood *Minhalot*, or administrations, established since the 1970s, in which residents take responsibility for various aspects of life in the neighborhoods in which they live, electing a local committee to ensure the determination of their needs and wishes and also to ensure their fulfillment. In other words, the concept and its practical implementation are both already in place.

It is worth noting that one reason these *minhalot* have been so successful is that they really involve ALL the sectors and institutions in their respective areas of responsibility—women, men, teachers and schoolchildren at the local schools, shopkeepers, young couples and pensioners. Everybody was invited to Town Hall-style meetings to speak and to listen and to help reach decisions acceptable to the majority which did not ignore the needs and desires of the minority.

As in Mandate times, each of the neighborhoods and boroughs would send elected representatives to a central municipal council, which would be responsible for all matters

relating to the city as a whole (education, town planning, transportation, sanitation, municipal parks, etc.). Separateness need not involve alienation; equality can produce fruitful cooperation and collaboration.

Although such a plan is, in my opinion, wholly viable with regard to a Jerusalem municipality whose borders would perhaps not include the new neighborhoods built since 1967, it still makes no provision precisely and specifically, for the Old City, which is still a jumble, a mosaic of ethnicities and religions. The Western Wall abuts on the Temple Mount, but this is now the site of Muslim, not Jewish, shrines. Even the Western Wall Plaza itself is an area of dispute; the Orthodox religious establishment that is responsible for its administration perceives and operates it as to all intents and purposes an Orthodox place of worship, an open-air synagogue in which men and women are separated and where women who wish to pray in a manner not accepted by Orthodoxy are prevented from doing so, are excluded, as are adherents of non-Orthodox streams of Judaism, such as the Conservative and Reform movements.

At least seven Christian communities established claim to the Holy Sepulchre, including Franciscans, Greek Orthodox, Georgians, Armenians, Abyssinians, Syrians and

Copts. Anyone who has read Muriel Sparks's *The Mandelbaum Gate*, with its uproarious account of Easter in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre prior to 1967, will be aware of the squabbles and even physical clashes that marked the festival before the Israelis established order and precedence. Tellingly, during the Ottoman period, the keys of the Holy Sepulchre were in the hands of a Muslim Jerusalem family and even today Jordan sees itself as responsible for the Christian holy sites in the city. There is intra-religious as well as inter-religious tension just as there is tension between Muslim and Christian Arabs. (Nevertheless, old timers who lived in the Old City prior to 1948 speak nostalgically of Arab wet nurses who suckled Jewish babies and conversely, Jews who suckled Muslim or Christian infants. They recall Arab neighbors who stood in front of their gates during the riots of the 1920s, barring entry to fellow Arabs bent on murdering the Jews.

The Old City requires a solution unto itself. We have diversity in plenty; but how do we create harmony? I would suggest, once again, using an in parvo version of the neighborhood council, but in this case one based entirely on equal representation of each and every one of the religious denominations that reside in the Old City including the

secular, who would come together to propose a just distribution of space and to determine the times of day, of the week, of the year when each of the holy places would be accessible to each of the various religions and sects that at present lay exclusive claim to holy sites of their respective religions. It is, for example, essential that Jews have access to the Temple Mount, even for prayer; that women and the non-Orthodox be able to pray at the Western Wall. Mutual respect is essential, as is a readiness to forgo exclusivity of “ownership.” Even sacred space can be allocated. For example, Prof. Arthur Kaufman, a physicist from the Hebrew University, who is an Orthodox Jew, has calculated that the Temple stood at the northern end of the mount and not on the site of the mosques. A kind of not entirely satisfactory *modus vivendi* has also been found for enabling women and non-Orthodox streams of Judaism to pray in the vicinity of the Western Wall. Another, better, solution would be to adopt the practice of certain swimming pools: separate swimming (i.e. prayer) at different times, but at the same location. A Jerusalem Inter-Religious Council would be mandated to determining such a *modus vivendi* and, thereafter, with ensuring its observance by all concerned.

Some kind of external moderating mediation may be necessary to ensure fair play and equity; but that is a far cry from the internationalization proposed in 1947. Jerusalem should be autonomous, self-regulatory, self-governing, with no outside intervention by religious authorities outside the city. Not the functionaries of the various religions, but the common folk, the practitioners, should be in charge. This would also give a voice to women, who are currently silenced in virtually all of the religions. Jerusalemites and only Jerusalemites must develop their own separate peace. They must fully internalize the truth of W. H. Auden's famous imperative "We must love one another or die."

"Love": I know that the word, the concept, is problematic in our times. Many people find it sentimental, cloying, unduly emotional. Some Jews think it is too Christian. But in fact love is central to Judaism as well. We are bidden to love the Lord our God "with all thy heart, with all thy soul and with all thy might." And we are commanded to love our neighbours as ourselves. In this case, it is our common love of Jerusalem that must lead us to a constructive model of cooperation and collaboration.

Of course my proposal will in all probability be derided as unrealistic, impracticable, utopian or just plain nonsense, particularly at a time when Jerusalem is again being tragically divided by walls and fences, which close in one group even as they close out another. But then, our mandate for this conference was to dream, wasn't it? – to present a vision, however improbable and incapable of being implemented. I am neither a theologian nor a figure of religious authority. I assume I was invited to this conference and to address this particular issue because I am a Jewish woman of (sometimes wavering, questioning) faith who declines to define herself as adhering uniquely or exclusively to any one of the contemporary streams of Judaism. I have lived for over fifty-five years, almost all my adult life, in Jerusalem and I love the city deeply. I am also an incorrigible optimist. And I am optimistic because there are some moments in post-1967 history that I shall never forget. One is of Jerusalem on the first Shavuot, the Festival of First Fruits, less than a week after the Six Day War, when tens of thousands of Israeli Jews from all over the country streamed to Jerusalem, like their forebears in the days when the Temple still stood, to pray together at the Western Wall, which some of us had never seen and others had not seen for the almost twenty years of Jordanian

occupation – the “Wailing Wall” at which, under the British, Jews had been forbidden to blow the shofar, the traditional ram’s horn that on the Jewish New Year recalls, inter alia, the ram that replaced human sacrifice in Abraham’s time. We stood *together*, men and women, young and old, Ashkenazim, Sephardim, religiously observant and totally secular, even anti-religious, in an all-too brief moment of spiritual exaltation, of national unity, bound by the historical significance of this particular site at this particular time. But on that day of Jewish rejoicing the Arab residents of the Old City were under curfew, confined to their homes.

I recall equally vividly the day not long afterwards when the barriers between East and West Jerusalem fell and the residents of the Old City and East Jerusalem came streaming into the centre of the modern western city, walking in wonder among the shops and restaurants, moving down the flower beds in the middle of Herzl Boulevard to avoid unfamiliar pedestrian traffic signals. We stretched out our hands in greeting to each other, to our erstwhile enemies, our fellow Jerusalemites. For some all too brief time there was cordiality and hope, but they were all too soon strangled, stifled by external political forces on both sides, bent, it would seem, on perpetuating inequities and hostilities.

From that brief period and from my own experience of dialogue with the “other” – whether that “other” is a fellow Jew or an adherent of another faith or no faith – I have learned that hatred and mistrust *can* be overcome and that it should be precisely our common belief in a deity (or a spirit) of love, justice and mercy that could provide a basis for reconciliation and co-existence. The alternative is too terrible to contemplate.

Despite its long history of conflict, Jerusalem is the obvious place in which to create religious harmony and thus perhaps fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah: “My house shall be called a house of prayer for *all* peoples.” “My house” being not this building or that – this church, this mosque, this synagogue – but rather the entire city of Jerusalem, which then could perhaps be re-named the City of the Rainbow. The rainbow is, in fact, a fitting paradigm – it comes into existence when contrary elements – light and water, sun and rain – occur simultaneously. It fills the sky with glory, but its “feet,” as it were, are based on the earth. It contains a variety of distinct colours – yet together these merge, blend into one glorious, heart-lifting vision. The rainbow is the emblem God used when He vowed never again to destroy His own creation. A vow made *before* Abraham – to *all* humankind. Let it be our emblem too.