

The Gate That is Jerusalem: **Yom Yerushalayim as a Path that Leads Beyond**

Rachel Sharansky Danziger * 20/5/2025 * Silence and Song: Prayers and Torah for Israel's National Holidays #3

1: Between worlds

Tourists by Yehuda Amichai

Visits of condolence is all we get from them.
 They squat at the Holocaust Memorial,
 They put on grave faces at the Wailing Wall
 And they laugh behind heavy curtains
 In their hotels.
 They have their pictures taken
 Together with our famous dead
 At Rachel's Tomb and Herzl's Tomb
 And on Ammunition Hill.
 They weep over our sweet boys
 And lust after our tough girls
 And hang up their underwear
 To dry quickly
 In cool, blue bathrooms.

Once I sat on the steps by agate at David's Tower,
 I placed my two heavy baskets at my side. A group of tourists
 was standing around their guide and I became their target marker. "You see
 that man with the baskets? Just right of his head there's an arch
 from the Roman period. Just right of his head." "But he's moving, he's moving!"
 I said to myself: redemption will come only if their guide tells them,
 "You see that arch from the Roman period? It's not important: but next to it,
 left and down a bit, there sits a man who's bought fruit and vegetables for his family."

Jerusalem is a Port City by Yehuda Amichai

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JERUSALEM IS A PORT CITY

Jerusalem is a port city on the shore of eternity.
 The Temple Mount is a great ship, a pleasure yawl
 In splendor.
 From the portholes of her Wailing Wall, jubilant saints
 Peer like passengers. Hasidim on the pier wave
 Goodbye, yelling hurrah, bon voyage. She
 Is always docking, always embarking.
 And the fences and docks
 And policemen and flags and churches' high masts
 And the mosques and the smokestacks of synagogues and the chanteys
 Of praise and mountain-billows.
 The ram's horn sounds out sunset: one more
 Has set sail.
 Yom Kippur sailors in white uniforms
 Ascend between the ropes and ladders of tried-and-true prayers.
 And the profits of market and gates and goldencap domes:
 Jerusalem is the Venice of God.

2: The path between realms

A New Song of Zion Avital Macales

From: Az Nashir: Between Silence and Song

We drive into Jerusalem every day.
I'm not sure which one of us is in the
driver's seat, You or I.

Every time we pass the road sign that points
toward Jerusalem,
I wonder how I merited to live in my
ancestors' dream,
to be counted in the unfolding of an
ancient promise.

***By the rivers of Babylon,
there we sat,
and wept,
as we remembered Zion.***

On the road this morning from Gush
Etzion to Jerusalem,
Waze announces:
"Traffic building up ahead. Ten minutes
added."
Oof. I'm going to be late for work.

Then I think of my ancestors' GPS —
God's Plan Spoken —
offering them its most devastating
recalculation yet:
*"It will take hundreds, if not thousands, of
years
till you see the city you were
so brutally
torn away from."*

OK, OK.
I think I can handle this delay.

I look up ahead —
dozens of cars are trying to get through the
checkpoint at the same time,
all wishing to
get to Zion
as well.

***There, on the willows,
we hung up our lyres,
for our captors asked us there for songs,
our tormentors for amusement:
"Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"***

***How can we sing the Lord's song
in a foreign land?!***

Traffic comes to a standstill,
and I press the brake.
*I sit with my ancestors by the rivers,
and wait with them in their silence,
stuck.*
God, how could they not sing?
I wonder.
*What is left of an exiled people,
if not their music?
Their voice?*

I begin to hum.

A loud honk jolts me from behind —
"Hey, *Geveret*, it's time to move forward!"
A whisper from among the willows says—
Yes, go on,
sing us a new song of Zion.
You can.

***A song of ascents.
When the Lord restores the exiles
of Zion, we shall be like dreamers.***

I drive through the checkpoint,
wave to the soldiers,
and thank them
for playing their part
in making this dream come true...

My mother says I cried during takeoff.
It may be because I was out of Cheerios.
Or it might be because,
sometimes,
it can be frightening
to live in the time of redemption.

I enter the tunnels,
and suddenly —

You still there?
Everything is dark.
So dark
and long,

with unexpected bends,
the end nowhere in sight.

Waze gives up as well.

Are we still on our way to Jerusalem?

My dear exiled river-sitters,
now I see what it feels like
when despair drives you

to stop
singing.

One last curve of the road,
and suddenly — light!
Zion unfolding before us!

I exit the tunnels with a sigh with relief, but
also wonder —
did we really have to go this way?
God's Plan has *Spoken*, but...
mind if I check the navigation settings
You're using?

***Then among the nations they will
say—
God has done great things for
them!***

The hum of life through the streets of
Jerusalem
swirls around us,
with children laughing,
and elders sitting and chatting —
and I see that, yes,

***You have done great things for
us.***

And though the road still stretches ahead,
I hear something stirring —
lyres, released, strumming freely in the
breeze,
playing a new song of Zion.

So we will play.
We will sing.

We will rejoice.

3: Breaking walls, making doors

II Samuel 24:14

(14) David said to Gad, "I am in great distress. Let us fall into the hands of the LORD, for His compassion is great; and let me not fall into the hands of men."

I Samuel 28:15-20

(15) Samuel said to Saul, "Why have you disturbed me and brought me up?" And Saul answered, "I am in great trouble. The Philistines are attacking me and God has turned away from me; He no longer answers me, either by prophets or in dreams. So I have called you to tell me what I am to do..." (19) Further, the LORD will deliver the Israelites who are with you into the hands of the Philistines. Tomorrow your sons and you will be with me; and the LORD will also deliver the Israelite forces into the hands of the Philistines." (20) At once Saul flung himself prone on the ground, terrified by Samuel's words. Besides, there was no strength in him, for he had not eaten anything all day and all night.

II Samuel 24:17-25

(17) When David saw the angel who was striking down the people, he said to the LORD, "I alone am guilty, I alone have done wrong; but these poor sheep, what have they done? Let Your hand fall upon me and my father's house!" (18) Gad came to David the same day and said to him, "Go and set up an altar to the LORD on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite."... (25) And David built there an altar to the LORD and sacrificed burnt offerings and offerings of well-being. The LORD responded to the plea for the land, and the plague against Israel was checked.

שמואל ב כ"ד:י"ד

(יד) וַיֹּאמֶר דָּוִד אֶל-גָּד צֶרֶר-לִי מְאֹד נִפְלֵה-נָא בְּיַד-יְהוָה כִּי-רַבִּים רַחֲמוֹ [רַחֲמָיו] וְבְיַד-אָדָם אֶל-אֶפְלָה:

שמואל א כ"ח:ט"ו-כ'

(טו) וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁמוּאֵל אֶל-שָׁאוּל לָמָּה הִרְגַּזְתָּנִי לְהַעֲלוֹת אֹתִי וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁאוּל צֶרֶר-לִי מְאֹד וּפְלִשְׁתִּים | נִלְחָמִים בִּי וְאֱלֹהִים סָר מֵעָלַי וְלֹא-עֲנִי עוֹד גַּם בְּיַד-הַנְּבִיאִם גַּם-בַּחֲלֻמוֹת וְאֶקְרָא לָךְ לְהוֹדִיעַנִי מָה אַעֲשֶׂה...: (יט) וַיִּתֵּן יְהוָה גַּם אֶת-יִשְׂרָאֵל עַמּוֹ בְּיַד-פְּלִשְׁתִּים וּמָחָר אָתָּה וּבָנֶיךָ עִמִּי גַם אֶת-מִחְנֶה יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּתֵּן יְהוָה בְּיַד-פְּלִשְׁתִּים: (כ) וַיִּמָּהַר שָׁאוּל וַיִּפֹּל מִלֵּא-קוֹמָתוֹ אַרְצָה וַיָּרָא מְאֹד מִדְּבַר שְׁמוּאֵל גַּם-כִּפְּחַל לֹא-הָיָה בּוֹ כִּי לֹא אָכַל לֶחֶם כָּל-הַיּוֹם וְכָל-הַלַּיְלָה:

שמואל ב כ"ד:י"ז-כ"ה

(יז) וַיֹּאמֶר דָּוִד אֶל-יְהוָה בְּרֹאָתוֹ | אֶת-הַמִּלָּחָם | הַמִּכָּה בָעָם וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה אֲנִכִּי חָטָאתִי וְאֲנִכִּי הָעוֹיָתִי וְאַלֶּה הַצֹּאן מִה עָשׂוּ תְהִי גַּא יָדְךָ בִּי וּבְבֵית אָבִי: (פ) (יח) וַיָּבֹא-גָד אֶל-דָּוִד בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ עֲלֵה הַקָּם לַיהוָה מִזִּבְחַת בָּגֶרֶן אֲרֻנִּיה [אַרְנוֹנָה] הַיְבֻסִּי:... (כה) וַיְבֹן שָׁם דָּוִד מִזְבֵּחַ לַיהוָה וַיַּעַל עֹלוֹת וַיִּשְׁלָמִים וַיַּעֲתֶר יְהוָה לְאַרְצָ וַתִּעְצֹר הַמִּגֶּפָה מֵעַל יִשְׂרָאֵל:

4: Jerusalem's impact

Rabbi Sacks, A Letter in the Scroll:

It was then that an extraordinary thing began to happen. Throughout the university Jews suddenly became visible. Day after day they crowded into the little synagogue in the centre of town. Students and dons who had never before publicly identified as Jews could be found there praying. Others began collecting money. Everyone wanted to help in some way, to express their solidarity, their identification with Israel's fate.

That was when I realised that being Jewish was an exceptionally odd thing to be, structurally odd. Jewish identity was not simply a truth or set of truths I could accept or reject. It was not a preference I could express or disavow. It was not a faith I could adopt or leave alone. I had not chosen it. It had chosen me.

Yerushalayim: Above and Below

Shel Mala and Mata

Rachel Sharansky Danziger

From: *Az Nashir – Between Silence and Song Hashem*

For so long we have walked through dry deserts,
and the dream of this place
lent strength to our feet.

Yerushalayim, we thought,
in Ethiopia and Russia
in too many places
too many seasons
of hardship and loss.

Yerushalayim, we thought,
and our feet grew lighter,
our hearts more resolved.

When walls and hatred closed on us
we looked to this dream
to open up the narrow spaces
of distress
Inside our soul.

Yerushalayim, we thought,
and the horizon grew broader.
Yerushalayim, we thought,
and found the courage to stand up.

The prayers and dreams of countless generations
lapped upon the shores of the *Yerushalayim* in our
minds

And we were like dreamers cast into reality
when our feet found their way
To *Yerushalayim shel Mata*,
which exists outside of dreams.

A place of stone and dust and olives.
A place where we can taste eternity
even as our feet are rooted in the ground.
Where we can touch a wall and feel the thrum of
history,
a beating heart inside a city,
an ancient swelling song.

Hashem, we rejoice in this privilege,
The privilege of touching where our ancestors could
but dream.

And we are grateful, so deeply grateful,
for the dream of *Yerushalayim* that gave them
comfort
and lent them purpose, patience, strength.
Thank you, *Hashem*, for the lighthouse that shone
Out of the idea of *Yerushalayim*
And for the light of physical *Yerushalayim*
which we are fortunate enough to feel
Upon our faces.

5. Future waters

Ezekiel 47:1-12

(1) I was led back to the entrance of the temple, and I found that water was issuing from below the platform of the temple—eastward, since the temple faced east—but the water was running out at the south of the altar, under the south wall of the temple. (2) Then he led me out by way of the northern gate and led me around to the outside of the outer gate that faces in the direction of the east; and I found that water was gushing from [under] the south wall. (3) As that went on eastward with a measuring line in his hand, he measured off a thousand cubits and led me across the water; the water was ankle deep. (4) Then he measured off another thousand and led me across the water; the water was knee deep. He measured off a further thousand and led me across the water; the water was up to the waist. (5) When he measured yet another thousand, it was a stream I could not cross; for the water had swollen into a stream that could not be crossed except by swimming.

(6) “Do you see, O mortal?” he said to me; and he led me back to the bank of the stream. (7) As I came back, I saw trees in great profusion on both banks of the stream. (8) “This water,” he told me, “runs out to the eastern region, and flows into the Arabah; and when it comes into the sea, into the sea of foul waters, the water will become wholesome. (9) Every living creature that swarms will be able to live wherever this stream goes; the fish will be very abundant once these waters have reached there. It will be wholesome, and everything will live wherever this stream goes. (10) Fishermen shall stand beside it all the way from En-ge-di to En-eglaim; it shall be a place for drying nets; and the fish will be of various kinds [and] most plentiful, like the fish of the Great Sea. (11) But its swamps and marshes shall not become wholesome; they will serve to [supply] salt. (12) All kinds of trees for food will grow up on both banks of the stream. Their leaves will not wither nor their fruit fail; they will yield new fruit every month, because the water for them flows from the temple. Their fruit will serve for food and their leaves for healing.”

יחזקאל מ"ז:א'-י"ב

(א) וַיִּשְׁבְּנִי אֶל-פֶּתַח הַבַּיִת וְהִנֵּה-מַיִם יֹצְאִים מִתַּחַת מִזְבֵּחַ הַבַּיִת קְדִימָה כִּי-פָנֵי הַבַּיִת קִדְּמִים וְהַמַּיִם יֵרְדִים מִתַּחַת מִכְנַת הַבַּיִת הַיְמָנִית מִנֶּגֶב לַמִּזְבֵּחַ: (ב) וַיּוֹצֵאֲנִי דֶרֶךְ-שָׁעַר צְפוֹנָה וַיִּסְבְּנִי דֶרֶךְ חוּץ אֶל-שָׁעַר הַחוּץ דֶּרֶךְ הַפּוֹנֶה קִדְּמִים וְהִנֵּה-מַיִם מִפָּכִים מִן-הַפֶּתַח הַיְמָנִית: (ג) בְּצֵאת-הָאִישׁ קִדְּמִים וָקוּ בִידּוֹ וַיִּמָּד אֵלָי בָּאֶמָּה וַיַּעֲבֵרֵנִי בַמַּיִם מִי אֶפְסוֹסִים: (ד) וַיִּמָּד אֵלָי וַיַּעֲבֵרֵנִי בַמַּיִם מִי בִרְכָּבִים וַיִּמָּד אֵלָי וַיַּעֲבֵרֵנִי מִי מִתְנַגִּים: (ה) וַיִּמָּד אֵלָי נָחַל אֲשֶׁר לֹא-אוּכָל לַעֲבֹר בִּי-גֵאָו הַמַּיִם מִי שְׂחוֹ נָחַל אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יַעֲבֹר:

(ו) וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלַי הֲרָאִיתָ בּוֹ-אָדָם וַיּוֹלֶכֶנִי וַיִּשְׁבְּנִי שְׂפַת הַנָּחַל: (ז) בְּשׁוֹבִנִי וְהִנֵּה אֶל-שְׂפַת הַנָּחַל עֵץ רַב מְאֹד מִזֶּה וּמִזֶּה: (ח) וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלַי הַמַּיִם הָאֵלֶּה יּוֹצְאִים אֶל-הַגִּלְלִיָּה הַקְּדוֹמָה וַיֵּרְדּוּ עַל-הָעֲרֵבָה וַיָּבֹאוּ הַיָּמָה אֶל-הַיְמָה הַמוּצָאִים וַיִּנְרָפֹאוּ הַמַּיִם: (ט) וְהָיָה כָּל-נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה אֲשֶׁר-יִשְׁרָץ אֵל כָּל-אֲשֶׁר יָבוֹא שָׁם נְחָלִים יִחְיֶה וְהָיָה הַדָּגָה רַבָּה מְאֹד כִּי יָבֹאוּ שָׁמָּה הַמַּיִם הָאֵלֶּה וַיִּנְרָפֹאוּ וְחַי כָּל אֲשֶׁר-יָבוֹא שָׁמָּה הַנָּחַל: (י) וְהָיָה (יַעֲמֹדוּ) [עֲמֹדוּ] עָלָיו דּוֹגִים מֵעֵין גְּדִי וְעַד-עֵין עֲגָלִים מִשְׁטוֹחַ לַחֲרָמִים יִהְיוּ לַמִּינֶה תִּתֵּנָה דְגָתָם כְּדָגַת הַיָּם הַגָּדוֹל רַבָּה מְאֹד: (יא) בְּצֵאתָ וּבָבָאָו וְלֹא יִרְפָּאוּ לַמֶּלַח נִתְּנוּ: (יב) וְעַל-הַנָּחַל יַעֲלֶה עַל-שְׂפָתוֹ מִזֶּה וּמִזֶּה אֶל-עֵץ מִמָּכָל לֹא-יָבוֹל עָלָהוּ וְלֹא-יָתֵם פְּרִי לַחֲדָשִׁיו יִבָּרַר כִּי מִמֵּיו מִן-הַמִּקְדָּשׁ הֵמָּה יּוֹצְאִים (וְהָיוּ) [וְהָיָה] פְּרִי לַמֶּלֶךְ וְעָלָהוּ לַתְּרוּפָה: {פ}

6: Past water

A Prayer for Jerusalem, Born of the Deep Sarah Tuttle-Singer

God of the beating heart of Jerusalem,
Source of her breath and being,
You who formed her hills from the ancient sea,
Who set her foundations in the bones of the earliest
life,
Who carved her valleys with the memory of water—
I call to You now.

For before there were stones, there was sea,
Before there were walls, there were waves,
Before there were battlements, there was only the deep.

Jerusalem rose from the waters You gave and
withdrew, and still that sea remains, hidden in her
bones.
In the limestone that once cradled shells,
in the fossils pressed into desert rock,
in the hush before the rain when the air tastes of salt.

The tides abide.

God of the depths and the heights,
God of the wellspring and the wilderness,
Help us remember:
Jerusalem was first a place of gathering —
Not of dividing.
A place where waters mingled —
Not where blood was spilled.
A place where the great currents of the deep
Moved together in harmony,
As we, too, must learn to be carried and moved.

For even now, the sea is in us.
It is in the thrum of the market,
In the rise and fall of voices in the shuk,
In the shifting tide of feet on stone,
In the rhythm of prayer, of argument, of song.
It is in the spice merchant measuring zaatar and rose
petals,
The weaver tying knots into fabric,
The map seller tracing his finger along the roads that
have carried generations home,
for here we are.
God of the first waters,
God of the rivers that remember their way back to the
sea,

Gather us together as You once gathered the depths.

Let us meet as the currents meet,
not in conquest,
but in the knowing that we are of the same source.

Infinite You.

For we are the children of this city's dust and water,
of its sorrow and its splendor,
of its history and its hope.
We are the shopkeeper handing warm bread to the hungry,
the artist who gathers shattered glass and makes it whole again
with molten gold,
the teacher who helps the lost child find the thread of meaning
in the words.

We are the mother pressing her palm to the Western Wall,
And the father waiting at the bus stop, looking for his son's
face.

We are the student on the train,
reading scripture beside the soldier who dozes,
beside the grandmother who hums an old song,
beside the dreamer who has journeyed a lifetime
just to be in this place.

God of the deep past,
God of the future ever flowing,
Teach us to remember what came before
So we do not drown in what we have built.
Remind us that the walls are not what make Jerusalem —
It is the water that still moves beneath them,
It is the people who carry her story,
It is You, the beating heart of this city,
Still pulsing beneath our feet.

Let us listen through our seashells ears.
Let us hear the hidden waves,
The echo of the sea within the stone,
And within each other.
And let that be what draws us together —
Not fear, not fire, not war,
But the knowledge that once,
Before all this,
We were all part of the same sea.

And if we listen, if we look,
Perhaps we will remember how to move as one again,
together.

Amen.