

BETWEEN YOU AND ME

There is a story in the Talmud that attempts to describe what it is about Jerusalem that makes it so special. The rabbis say that “ten measures of beauty descended upon the world – nine were taken by Jerusalem, and one by the rest of the world.” While it is not unusual for the rabbis of the Talmud to utilize their incredible imaginations to craft such an explanation, I believe that their imagination was the only tool available to them when tasked with describing an indescribable city. There is no rational way to approach her; emotional imagery is the ONLY way to make sense of our connection with her.



Rabbi Wohlner

Whether or not you have traveled to Jerusalem, you have been impacted by her beauty. Even here, in Memphis, Tennessee, we find reminders of Jerusalem. We find her mentioned in our Bible over 600 times: One of the most notable lines, from Psalm 137, is the subject of artwork in at least two rabbinic offices here at Temple Israel: “If I forget thee O, Jerusalem, let my right hand wither.” In the weekday Amidah (the central prayer of the Jewish service) we pray: “*Baruch ata Adonai notein shalom birushalayim*,” “Blessed is Adonai, Who gives peace to Jerusalem.” She surrounds us in numerous pieces of art; is found on many Jewish ritual objects in our homes, from *kiddish* cups to *tallitot*, from *kippot* to *channukiyot*.



We are surrounded by images of the one city that has been carried in the hearts of the Jewish people for thousands of years. So much so, that many synagogues are situated so that their sanctuaries face East toward Jerusalem. All of these things remind us that our Judaism seeks to draw us, almost with a gravitational pull, toward Jerusalem.

Some of you have had the privilege of spending time in Jerusalem. As I share with you *my* Jerusalem, I hope you will reminisce about your own experiences and share them with others. And, if you have not yet had the opportunity to visit Jerusalem, may these stories encourage you to find your own way to Jerusalem, either through books, art, or a visit.

I truly can sum up my Jerusalem in one word: SHABBAT. Oh how I love Shabbat in Jerusalem. What did I love? I loved the full experience of Shabbat, starting with the preparation. You take a full day off to get ready for your...day off. Friday morning was a great start to the day by being the ONLY day of the week that I was able to sleep in – a quick way to my heart. And although cleaning is not my favorite pastime, cleaning for Shabbat is like preparing your home for a guest you have been waiting and waiting to visit you. It is done with such care and anticipation that you don't feel the burden of the to-do list, only the excitement of being able to walk into Shabbat completely ready. After preparing our apartment, Molly, my roommate in Israel, and I would gather our reusable grocery bags and walk the half-hour to the *shuk*, the open-air market. It took us a couple months to find our favorite sellers, but we did. We'd walk straight through the main thoroughfare, turn left at the butcher, then turn right past the spice guy, and we'd be there. It was a section of the *shuk* that had wider aisles and calmer shoppers – a rare find.

When we returned home from the *shuk* to our now sparkingly clean apartment, it was time to prepare our dish for a Shabbat dinner potluck we'd been invited to or one that we were hosting ourselves. Roasted vegetables were our specialty, though it helped that the produce in Israel was so fresh and delicious that we didn't really have to do much other than add olive oil, salt, and pepper.

Once everything was prepared, it was time to head to the Shabbat service. I loved walking to synagogue – the further, the better. There was something about the quiet on the streets as Shabbat made its descent upon the city. As we walked, each step held great anticipation; each step was one step closer to greeting Shabbat. I can't fully describe what made it have this intensity, but it did. The anticipation of greeting Shabbat remained new and exciting each week.

After a Kabbalat Shabbat service filled with psalms and songs, we'd walk to a dinner that seemed to exist in its own reality of time. Before the meal, we'd start with the blessings as we do here, but somehow as the candlesticks stood tall on the white tablecloth, we remembered what one of our teachers had told us, that the symbols on the Shabbat table are all symbolic of the land of Israel – the candlesticks represent the olive oil (how candles used to be produced); the wine, made of grapes, another one of Israel's crops, and finally the challah, made from the wheat grown in the North of Israel. Suddenly, our table was transformed into a collection of offerings from the land. Finally, we'd eat, and once the meal was over, we'd break out in song, sometimes for hours.

The night ended, and we stepped out into the cool night to quietly walk home. We listened to the songs rising from the houses we passed by, filled with their own Shabbat celebrations. As we journeyed home – our bellies, still full from dinner – we would smile and wish a “Shabbat Shalom” to everyone we saw, friends and strangers, knowing that they too were full of food and the joy of yet another Shabbat. As I closed my eyes in bed at the end of the night, I fell asleep with a soft smile on my face, excited to awake in the morning still enveloped by Shabbat.

I will forever carry Shabbat in Jerusalem with me. Each Shabbat holds a part of that joy I experienced in Jerusalem, even here in Memphis where I have the honor of celebrating Shabbat with many of you.

I think the rabbis were on to something: there is something inexplicable about her, something that makes it seem reasonable that Jerusalem received 9/10^{ths} of the beauty given to the world. I think we believe it, we *feel* it, because even if we can't be there, on Shabbat, or on any other day, we are surrounded by her – the skyline on our *kiddush* cups; the western wall adorning our *seder* plate or *tallit*; the images on our tapestries – we see the beauty captured visually in our Jewish lives daily. Whether or not we actually are there, Jerusalem is with us – a quiet spiritual presence that brings meaning to our lives.

L'Shalom,

Rabbi Bess Wohlner

