

“I Dream of Peace in Jerusalem”

Reflections of Hope and Love

Prepared for World Week for Peace in Palestine Israel

29 May – 4 June 2011

Joint action for a just peace convened by the World Council of Churches

In Spring 2011, a number of Jerusalemites – Christians, Muslims, and Jews – offered to share a written reflection on the theme, “I dream of peace in Jerusalem.”

We, the participants in and supporters of World Week for Peace in Palestine Israel 2011, join with these residents of Jerusalem in prayer for the peace of this city, and all who dwell within it.

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As Jesus approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, “If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace - but now it is hidden from your eyes” (Luke 19:41-42).

One can still hear those words resonating over the hills, into the winding small alleys of the city where the sound of bells and calls to prayer mingle with the voices of school children, the luring welcome of vendors and the intimidating roars of Israeli soldiers. Jerusalem is NOT a happy place despite the hustle bustle of tourists and pilgrims intoxicated by the aroma of spices and incense and the mystery emanating from the archaic buildings.

All the beautiful psalms, hymns and poems praising Jerusalem do not dwell on the suffering of the indigenous people, the defacing and desecration of sanctuaries and the fossilized hearts of rulers. One can almost hear the old stones crying out: Stop breaking and start building. No more soldiers, no home demolition, no settlers, no checkpoints, no land confiscation, no occupation!

Peace will come when laughter will float high in the skies of Jerusalem, when people will greet each other with a smile. According to Mother Teresa, “Peace starts with a smile.” In Jerusalem, people pass each other but do not see the other and unfortunately miss the divine image of God in the other. Peace will come when we understand that Jerusalem does not belong to one group or another but that in Jerusalem God meets humanity to love and respect each other. Peace will come when children are not taught to hate or fear, when they are free to learn, worship and enjoy all their national, social and economic rights. Peace will come when we respect international law and implement justice with compassion. Peace will come when there is joy, singing and sharing traditions and culture. Peace will come when we learn to glorify the Creator, each in our own faith and tradition, enfolded between the protecting arms of the city that can hold us all.

This is the Jerusalem I dream of, when we shall see smiling faces that finally know that the things that make for peace are not impossible and that we are all invited to celebrate life.

Nora Carmi

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With the beginning of Lent this year I prayed and meditated on what I might dedicate my fast for. The first thing that came to mind was the ability to worship in Jerusalem as a free Palestinian Christian.

Many years ago, I remember my mother taking me and my brothers to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher for Holy Fire Saturday. This is one of the most spiritual experiences that I have ever witnessed and it has remained so year after year. Something about seeing the light of Christ spread from the tomb in the Holy Sepulcher out into the packed corridors of the church then spill out into its courtyard, hearing praises to Our Lord said in different languages, seeing the Palestinian Christian youth rejoicing as they race to carry the light out to their different churches, watching the parade of local scouts as they celebrate the emerging of the light of Truth into the World makes it an almost ethereal experience. I remember how my mother held on to my brothers and I in that packed Church and I long for the day when I will be able to celebrate Holy Light Saturday in the Holy Sepulcher again.

In the past five years at least the Israeli occupation of my city Jerusalem has made it impossible for me as a Palestinian Christian to have access to the Holy Sepulcher during Easter. What started off as so-called "security arrangements" by Israel have developed into a full-fledged system of road-blocks in the old city of Jerusalem, "permits" allowing a small quota of local Christians to participate in liturgies of Easter, violation of human rights of freedom of worship and most horrifying of all the presence of machine guns in our most holy of places, The Holy Sepulcher, surrounding the worshipping faithful. All this imposed on Christians while Jewish worshippers were allowed free access to the Wailing Wall for their Pesach.

I pray for peace in Jerusalem that allows me to get to my church inside the Old City without having to fear being faced with a machine gun banning me from entering the city for the sole reason of being Palestinian. I dream of a peace that guarantees me the basic right of being treated as a human being, having freedom of worship and having it recognized as such; a right, not a favor granted from an occupying force.

Dr. Muna Mushahwar

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As a child, I grew up in the gentle English countryside, attending a school for the daughters of clergy. There, an end-of-term hymn was JERUSALEM, with words by William Blake. Ever since, Jerusalem has translated as an abstract place of spirituality, of inner battle – what in Judaism is “tikkun olam” and Islam knows as “jihad” – working on oneself to be a better human being, reflecting a city of peace, love and godliness, Jerusalem.

“Bring me my Bow of burning gold;
Bring me my Arrows of desire:
Bring me my Spear: O clouds unfold!
Bring me my Chariot of fire!
I will not cease from Mental Fight,
Nor shall my Sword sleep in my hand:
Till we have built Jerusalem,
In England's green and pleasant Land.”

And the organ would thunder inspirationally, uplifting our spirits.

Today, I live in modern Jerusalem, as an Israeli peace activist. A sad city, a city of shadowed history, a history of conflict, bloodshed and now – occupation. Palestinians in East Jerusalem live under a regime without basic human rights or the ability to develop to their potential and in the constant, fearful knowledge that their land and future is coveted. Demolitions and evictions are regular, in a policy of forced transfer. Internal displacement is commonplace, so refugees become refugees again and again, with no secure home or homeland in sight.

And religious zealots have turned the Holy Basin, especially Silwan, next to the Old City, into a modern Disneyland of money-making, echoing the city where Jesus turned out moneychangers. Spokespeople say, with disturbed ecstasy in their eyes: “You can SMELL King David here!!”

And so we progress. To where? Christian Zionists egg on Armageddon here in this city. As if nuclear holocaust or mass radiation (as currently threatened in Japan) could bring us closer to God or godliness. How much worse must it get before the climate of oppression will change and fears subside? How long will it take for all parties to need peace so much they'll move in that direction? Until the world wakes up, and stands up for justice, peace and truth, one can only dream of another Jerusalem.

In the meantime: “By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion.”

Angela Godfrey-Goldstein

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Dreams are interpreted as a succession of images, ideas, emotions and sensations occurring involuntarily in the mind during certain stages of sleep, but my dreams today are my true emotional reflections as a Palestinian Christian who has roots in the Holy City since Pentecost.

“Pray for the Peace of Jerusalem; they shall prosper that love thee. Peace be within thy walls and prosperity within thy Palace” (Psalm 122:6-7).

I dream of true peace in the City of Peace, peace that is in the hearts and minds of the Christians, Muslims and Jews alike;
I dream of peace that knows no borders in the City of walls and stones;
I dream of an open City for all worshippers regardless of their nationality, ethnicity, color, gender or creed;
I dream of a shared, free City that knows no violence, discrimination, oppression, suppression, and harassment;
I dream of peace in the City where human bonds connect people despite their differences;
I dream of a City where ploughs replace guns, knives and modern weapons;
I dream of peace where human rights and people’s dignity are preserved;
I dream of the City of the Seven Gates with no Separation Wall that divides and splits families apart;
My dream is to see Jerusalem, the Mother embracing her children as a chicken keeps her chicks under her wings;
I dream of a City where LOVE, TOLERANCE, JOY and HOPE prevail replacing hatred, destruction and death.

“Jerusalem the golden, with milk and honey blessed, Beneath thy contemplation sink heart and Voice oppressed. I know not, O I know not what Joys await us here, What radiance of glory, What light beyond compare” (Neale James Mason, Jerusalem, the Golden).

“For my brothers and companions’ sakes, I will say now, Peace be within thee. For the sake of the House of the Lord, I will seek thy good” (Psalm 122:8-9).

“Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low; and the crooked shall be made straight and the rough places plain. And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed; and all flesh shall see it together. For the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it“ (Isaiah 40:4-5).

Nora Kort

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