

Ode to Jerusalem by Judah Halevi

Jerusalem! Don't you have some greeting to return to
your last remaining flocks, your captive hearts, who
send you messages of love?
Here are greetings from the west and east, from north
and south, from near and far,
from every side; greetings also from a certain man, a
captive of your love,
who pours his tears like dew on Mount Hermón,
and longs to shed them on your slopes.
My voice is like a jackal's when I mourn your suffering,
but when I dream of how your exiles will return, I turn
into a lyre.
My heart is aching for Bethél, Peniel, Mahanáyim,
every place where saints encountered messengers
from God,
where the Shekhina is your neighbor,
where your Maker
made you gates that face the gates of heaven;
where the Glory of the Lord serves you for light,
not merely luminescent bodies—
sun and moon and stars.
You are the house of kings, the throne of David's God,
though slaves are sitting on your nobles' thrones.

I wish my soul could overflow
where once the holy spirit poured out
over your elect. I wish that I could wander
where the Lord revealed Himself
to visionaries, prophets,
I wish that I had wings so I could fly away to you, so
far,
and set the fragments of my broken heart among your
jagged mountains,
throw my face down to your ground,
to fondle your gravel, caress your soil.
Even more would I delight to stand beside the tombs
of ancestors and patriarchs,
gaze at your choice graves,
cross your fields and forests,
stand at Gilead, gaze at Avarím—
Hor and Avarím—the graves of two great lights,
two men who were your luminaries and your teachers.
Your air—the breath of life!
Flowing myrrh, the dust that rises from your soil!
Your rivers, molten honeycomb!
What joy my soul would have if I could walk
naked, barefoot, on the ruins,
on the rubble that your Temple has become,
where once your covenant-tabernacle was,
now hidden,
site of your two cherubim

that dwelt once in your hidden room—
I'd shear off, throw aside my splendid locks, curse the
fate that has defiled your nazirites in an unclean
land.

What pleasure can I get from food and drink while
watching dogs drag away your lions in their teeth?
How can my eyes enjoy the daylight when I see your
eagle's corpses carried off by crows?

Cup of sorrow, be gentle now! Let me be!
Long enough have my guts been filled with gall.
To contemplate the fate of Óhola is to gulp your
poisoned brew; to think of Óholiva's fate is to suck
the dregs.

Jerusalem, most beautiful! You bind your hair with love
and grace
as your true friends have bound their souls to you—
your friends who are in joy when you have peace,
but ache
at your destruction, weep for your disasters,
yearn for you from their captivity,
bow, wherever they may be, toward your gates:
your flocks, your exiled throngs, scattered
from hill to hill,
who still recall your folds,
reach for your hem, strive to rise
and grasp the branches of your palms.

Babylon and Egypt at their height—
what were they to you?
Could their blind oracles match the Urim and the
Tumim of your priests?
Did they have God-anointed kings,
prophets, Levites singing in their temples?
The crown of the ungodly kingdoms will tarnish,
vanish;
your greatness will endure, your crown is everlasting.
God chose to dwell in you:
Happy the man He chooses to bring near, who makes
his home within your courts,
who waits and lives to see your rising sun,
the new dawn breaking over you,
who lives to see those dear to you in bliss,
rejoicing in your joy,
when you return to what you were when you were
young.

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