

At The Gates of Jerusalem

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Far away, in the eastern part of the land, by the banks of the Jordan, the Lebanon mountains raise themselves up. On the slopes of the mountains a valley stretches out. There are fields and vineyards, orange groves and forests. In this valley a small village is built. In this small village live simple farmers. Among the farmers lives an old man, ninety years old, and his old wife, eighty-two years old. The old farmer and his wife live in their small, simple tent. The stable in which their white ass stands is built by the tent. By the stable lies the iron plow, gleaming in the sunlight. Every morning, after the rising of the sun, the farmer arises and goes out to his work. He saddles his ass and takes his shining plow. A small field stands near by, waiting to be plowed. The field stands empty, awaiting the old man.

The old one toils from morning until evening. Plowing and harrowing, he sows his grain. Roundabout all is quiet, all is peaceful, all is calm. The whole plain is silent as the farmer labors. The old man walks behind his plow, walks and thinks his pure thoughts. He thinks of the years gone by and of the time that his eyes beheld the holy city of Jerusalem. He used to bring the first fruits of the land to the Temple as a gift offering to the Lord for his bountiful gifts. The old one thinks of the priests, the Levites, and the elders of Jerusalem who came out to greet him. Even the king of Israel in his full glory bowed to him, an old farmer. "Peace to you, old one!" called the king. "Peace to your wife, your tent, and your animals!" "Peace, yea peace!" was heard from around. Thus the great community greeted him with a blessing. Then the timbrels were

struck, the horn was sounded, and everywhere throughout was joy, happiness, and merriment. And all this was to honor the old man who lived on the slopes of the Lebanon.

The old man remembers how he stood confused and did not know what to say. So the farmer plows, plows and reminisces. "Oh, that I should be fortunate enough to have yet another opportunity to see Jerusalem. Alas, I am old, ninety years of age. My days are already nearing their end, and my strength is ebbing. Yet before I die I should like to see the holy city once more. Would that I could again see the blessed Jerusalem!"

Tumult and congestion reigns throughout the capitol of the kingdom, for Jerusalem rejoices, and its inhabitants celebrate. Thousands of people are milling about in the tumult of the streets and markets. Some people are in chariots and some are on horseback; some are in carriages and some go on foot. Also, the boys and girls run and play in the midst of the festivities. By the gates of the city, by the gates of Jerusalem, the noise is seven times as great. The elders of the city, at whose head is the king, are seated on their thrones greeting the guests. And the guests are many, and their numbers are great. They are drawn in from all the borders of Judah. Among the guests are included the rich, the poor, the widow, and the orphan. They bring with them to Jerusalem their baskets in which are the flasks of wine and the first fruits of the land, gifts to the Lord and to those guardians of his place. The people of Jerusalem go out to greet them and to ask their welfare. The frivolity is beautiful,

the celebration is great, and each one blesses his neighbor.

Lo, the guests already have completed their duties; the elders of Jerusalem are arising to go. But see, there in the distance totters another traveller on his way and strengthens himself to continue on. There in the distance an old man of ninety years walks and stumbles, walks and draws near. His white beard is heavy with dust; his heavy coat is already damp with sweat. Yet the old man plods onward and draws nearer. In his hand is a staff; on his shoulders is a knapsack. His white ass, laden with corn and oil, is drawn behind him. The elders of Jerusalem see him from afar, hurry towards him, and prostrate themselves to the ground. "Peace to you, old one!" Calls the king. "Peace to your wife, your tent, and your animals!" "Aye, peace and blessing!" is heard from around. Thus the great community greeted him with a blessing. Then the timbrels were struck, the horn was sounded, and everywhere throughout was joy, happiness, and pleasantry.

The old man bowed twice to the ground after which he raised his eyes to Jerusalem. "Peace to you, mother, oh holy city! Peace to you, father, oh king of Israel! Peace to you, priests and Levites, and to your fami-

lies! Peace to you, brothers, oh people of Israel. Behold I am an old man, ninety years of age. My days are already nearing their end and my strength is ebbing. This is the last time that I shall be able to see Jerusalem, its king, and its officers. Receive my blessing, the blessing of an old man. I bring it to you from the slopes of the Lebanon.

"Like the cedar of the Lebanon, oh king, may your glory and honor greaten and flower. Like the morning star in the mountains, oh priests and Levites, may you light the way for your brothers, the Hebrews. And you, oh community, the children of Abraham and Isaac, like the stars of the heavens, may your numbers increase. Like the whelps of the lion, may your strength increase. Like the blueness of the sky may your hearts be pure. May you live in peace, my brothers. Peace and blessing be with you — my brothers, my people, my land, and my God."

As the old man finishes his last word, he lays down to rest at the gates of Jerusalem. The old man is old, ninety years of age; his strength is leaving him; his joints are weakening. And at the gates of Jerusalem he was gathered in unto his people, this old farmer from the slopes of the Lebanon.

This story is based on the Hebrew idyll,
"B'shaare Yerushalayim" (At the Gates of
Jerusalem) by N. Levin.