

A Break in the Action: Jerusalem as Mother

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It's been a hard day in the ER. Has the whole month, even year, been so tough? I honestly don't know. I know I just need to get out. Somehow recharge, refresh, get back to myself

I step outside, onto the street outside my ED. This is one of the most famous corners in Jewish life- the corner of Strauss and HaNeviim. It is evening -the type that Jerusalemites brag about- and with good reason. Jerusalem nights are often balmy, and often a balm that soothes. This is the medicine I am seeking tonight - the embrace of this city that knew more pain than you ever will, and still remains with head held high.

The tourists have come, but I am not looking for that tonight. Tonight, I want to see the ghosts, the haunting past the always seems to want to make you believe all was great then, and there was no pain in youth. These ghosts- the hanging out at Ritchie's Pizza, the Israeli teenagers emptying out the Allenby Café to race home at 2200 to see Kojak, the serene, deserted, dark end of Jaffa street, where my parents treat me to an ice cream before going to see the Kotel. This has

all faded but it too returns. This all part of the essence and mystique of Jerusalem.

Tonight, these are just ghosts. And while the tourists and the backpackers stop momentarily at this famous corner, they do not see the masters of the city by night. The tourists see the boutiques and the coffee houses, but my emergency department sees the alcoholics and the drug addicts. The city of cities becomes the domain of the down and out at night. A big switch from across town, but this is the only Jerusalem that I get to see. This corner belongs to them after midnight, not to the ghosts, and not to the tourists, but is Jerusalem nonetheless. Do they have ghosts of their own?

This, however, is not a paradox in the holiest of all cities. Jerusalem in all its splendor is after all a city of ruins as well. Hope yes, but ruins too. I can relate to this tonight ; it is part of Jerusalem's promise to me and perhaps them as well. The Midrash sees Jerusalem as our mother, and I understand that. Because your mother takes you in, no matter where you have been, no matter whom you have become, no matter how far you have fallen.