

Poem

On Har Hamenuchot

Refá'aini Veairafai

And it came to pass, as they still went on and talked, that behold, there appeared a chariot of fire and horses of fire, which parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into Heaven. And Elisha saw it, and he cried: "My father, my father, the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof!" And he saw him no more; and he took hold of his own clothes and rent them in two pieces. He took up also the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and went back, and stood by the bank of the Jordan (2 Kings 2:11-13).

And it shall come to pass on that day that a great shofar shall be blown; and they shall come that were lost in the land of Assyria, and they that were dispersed in the land of Egypt; and they shall worship the Lord in the holy mountain at Jerusalem (Isaiah 27:13).

I
After the tearing noise:
the drum roll
explosion,
the shrill symphony
sirens,
the rude telephone
ring,
comes
a place
of dead silence.

Under the full moon
the traffic from Tel Aviv
sounds a contrapuntal hum
to this gray mountain of rest
weighted with memory's gravity,
planted with groves of loss.

A distant horn of impatience
(not the Messiah's)
plays a discordant note,
the driver protesting life's brevity,
blasting his need to arrive sooner
while the mountain waits in patience.

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II
They say:
Cemeteries are hazardous at night.
They say:
Ghosts hover to haunt the living.

But you never listened,
to they.
And I am here as a patient,
in your waiting room.
Suffering
verbal lockjaw,
facial freezing
that only you can heal.

I need your smiles
to stop swirling into dust,
to slide
through linen wrapped
through earth turned
through stone set
and shine
on my darkness.

Together
again
we will hear this hum
echoing from Judah's mountains,
winding through its cities,
dancing down Jerusalem streets,

a traffic band of joy and gladness,
horns of patient pilgrims
ascending
in fiery chariots,
following Elijah
to the city you loved.

He is playing a shofar
toward a mountain of risings,
trumpeting *chuppah* tunes
for Israel's tribes,
for brides and grooms
lost,
for fathers and daughters
dispersed,

together again,
tonight.

This poem was written in memory of the author's cousins, Rabbi Dr. David Applebaum and his daughter, Naavah, who were murdered by a suicide bomber in Jerusalem, on Elul 13, 5763 (September 9, 2003). The day after the murder was supposed to have been Naavah's wedding day.

In this poem, the author recollects the intense feelings he had when he first visited their graves on Har Hamenuchot, as night was falling. Ed.

Photo: Jack Hazut