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The HEART OF THE WORLD

How can the wisdom of a small muscular pump bring peace to Jerusalem?

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Word Count :

The Jewish scholar and mystic Reb Nachman of Bratslav breathed new life into the Hasidic movement by telling stories (translated as Sipurei Ma'ashyoth in Hebrew) one of which is "The Heart and the Spring " (Interestingly, the Irish poet W. B. Yeats wrote a short story centiteled The Heart of the Spring").

Reb Nachman's tale could alternatively be entitled "Anima Mundi" as it opens with the following paragraph:

"Everything in the world has a heart, and the entire world also has a heart; and the heart of the world is a complete structure, with face, hands, feet etc; but the nail of the foot of the World's heart is heartier than the heart of anything else " (1)

Jerusalem , a unique city, different from "anything else" has been perceived for generations and by different cultures and religions as the centre- the "Heart of the World ". This association is ancient : the first early striking pictorial resemblance between Jerusalem and the heart can be found in the 7th century Byzantine Church of Saint George at Madaba in Jordan. (picture)

In his book “Jerusalem The Biography” (2) Simon Sebag Montefiore argues that Jerusalem has become the essential place on earth for communication between God and Man and therefore no other place evokes such desire for exclusive possession . Everyone wants to own this city, this “Heart”.

The Israeli, Jewish, philosopher, professor, writer and the co-author of the Israeli Army code of ethics Moshe Halbertal made a very poignant reflection on that matter by saying that :“If a place is holy, you can not own it “.

It is exactly this contradiction between sacredness and sovereignty which needs to be kept in mind and heart but sadly It is exactly this will for exclusive possession which is explicit in the declaration of Israel’s Prime Minister, Binjamin Netanyahu, made on the 18th of May 2015 in the “Merkaz Harav” Yeshiva in Jerusalem:

“Jerusalem is the eternal capital of the Jewish Nation. It is the heart of the Jewish Nation . We will not divide our heart, we will not give parts of it to strangers...”

Netanyahu might be surprised to see that in the centre of the Anahata –Heart Chakra image one finds Israel’s star of David.

The Heart Chakra is “the centre where one begins to love and understand people for what they are, regardless of their faults, where one begins to accept the other.” (3)

It represents EROS, psychic relatedness not Possession or the Will for Power.

Only psychic relatedness succeeded to facilitate a peace process in the Middle East.

It is important to remember that whilst power only maintained a no war situation it was the brave initiative of the late president of Egypt Anwar Sadat to come on the the 19th of November 1977 (only 4 years after he initiated a brutal military attack on Israel on the most sacred day to the Jewish people, the Day of Atonement-Yom

Kippur) and speak in person in front the Israeli parliament. His simple words :that melted the hearts and

enabled to establish peace between the two countries, which in spite of all the impossible conflicts and tensions in the middle east, still stands 40 years later.

C.G.Jung already reflected on those opposing attitudes nearly hundred years ago:

“Logically, the opposite of love is hate, and of Eros, Phobolos (fear); but psychologically it is the will for power .Where love reigns, there is no will for power, and where will for power is paramount love is lacking. The one is but the shadow of the other: the man who adopts the standpoint of Eros finds his compensatory opposite in the will for power, and that of the man who puts the accent on power is Eros.” (4)

The heart is one of the most powerful symbols of Eros. It is a living symbol:

“ When we say “I love you with all my heart,” we do and do not mean the heart as organ whose beats cause the circulation of blood throughout the body, whose failure could drain the body of life. We also mean the heart as feeling, as the soulful, as the heart of the cosmos, echoed and amplified in the primal pulsation of the drum.

Heart beats correspond to the contracting and expanding movements of the universe, while the heart in the body is as essential to life as the sun is to our solar system. “ (5)

In “Symbols of Transformation” C.G.Jung makes the distinction between Two Kinds of Thinking: Directed and Fantasy thinking (6) . Directed thinking is the language of the intellect, of scientific exposition and common sense. Fantasy thinking may be said to be metaphorical , symbolic and imaginative: the rules of logics and physics do not apply to it (7) For Jung directed and fantasy thinking coexist as two separate and equal perspectives. Both are essential enriching elements of our psychic life.

In the research I carried out as part of My Medical Doctorate at the Tel-Aviv University on all the Heart Transplantation Recipients living in Israel in 1992-1993, I found that these two kinds of thinking are both vital in order to psychologically process and adapt to the highly complex experience of having a heart transplantation.

The findings which were published in the Israel Journal of Psychiatry in a paper Entitled :”Another Person’s Heart: Magical and Rational Thinking in the Psychological Adaptation to Heart Transplantation” indicates that about half of our cohort of 35 heart recipients applied a dual psychic mode of processing the experience of receiving another person’s heart: A symbolic one side by side with a factual one. They expressed desires of fears of acquiring the donors characteristics via the heart whilst knowing that the heart is a muscular mechanical pump. (8)

On the background of these findings one can strongly feel the distortion, the concrete one sided, abusive attitude towards the heart metaphor by Benjamin Netanyahu. His view (which is unfortunately shared by many right winged Israeli Politicians) confuses between the Metaphorical, Symbolic Heart representing Soul, Spirit, Love and Compassion, which due to its numinous nature can not be possessed nor divided, and the Physical Organ called the heart which is actually, Concretely divided. It is divided into two main right and left parts by an impenetrable septum and its two parts are then divided again into two : an Atrium and a Ventricle.

Interestingly the Japanese language separates between these two aspects of the heart: The Symbolic heart is called KOKORO and the concrete physical heart is called SHINZOU. One can say that the KOKORO of Jerusalem can not be divided but the SHINZOU can and is divided!

Although the concrete heart is divided, its two Atriums from the opposing right and Left sides beat/contract simultaneously and so do the two ventricles from the opposing sides (after a delay of 0.12 sec).

Could the lesson to be learned from the wisdom, the embodied ANIMA MUNDI of

our small muscular pump, is that Division is essential for Unity ?

Maybe only after the concrete earthy Jerusalem, as opposed to the undividable numinous Jerusalem is divided like the human heart, the Palestinians could own a capital with a respected spiritual significance to be proud of.

It will then be possible for the two nations to start beat/contract simultaneously in a more heartfelt, harmonious way, beat together instead of beating each other.

To avoid division is incompatible with life. The divided human heart can beat more than 80 years. Any sensible politician would embrace 80 years of peace in Jerusalem; especially as in biblical times the longest time without war was half of it :

“ So the land had peace for forty years “ it is written in Judges 3.11

Maybe what works so well in the Micro muscular pump will work in the Macro of Jerusalem and the Middle East ? Maybe we should be more attuned to what the embodied soul of our heart can teach us, learn from it and implement it as part of the peace process ?

The heart does not only represent the most important emotions in man but also the most important aspects of existence and moral life (9). It represent the ethical fundamental rule: “ Love your neighbour as yourself, do as you would be done by”.

From this sense Netanyahu’s statement is heartless. Jerusalem is not just “the heart of the Jewish Nation” it is also the heart and soul of Christianity and Islam , clearly seen in the map of the four quarters of the old city of Jerusalem with its four quarters : the Jewish, Christian, Muslim and Armenian (picture). Netanyahu should read what Sari Nusseibeh, the Palestinian professor OF philosophy and former president of the Al-Quds University in Jerusalem wrote in his book “Once Upon a Country-A Palestinian Life”:

“The Jerusalem I was raised to love was the terrestrial gateway to the divine world where Jewish, Christian and Muslim prophets, men of vision and sense of humanity, met-if only in imagination “.

The “Strangers” Netanyahu speaks about are the other children of Abraham-the Christian and the Muslim Palestinians which Jerusalem is also their heart.

In 1992 I interviewed, as part of my Medical Doctorate on the Psychiatric Aspects of Heart Transplantation, an Arab from the Old City of Jerusalem who received through a Heart transplant the heart of an Israeli Soldier who was killed by Palestinians in Gaza.

Fundamentalists from both sides sadly condemned this graceful, deeply human act sides: some Jews asked why a heart of an Israeli soldier who was killed by Arabs is given to an Arab and some Arabs accused the man of taking into his chest the heart of the Enemy; But this gentle, modest, heart recipient from the Old City of Jerusalem said to me quietly :

“This is stupid, can’t they see, this is the proof that we all have the same pump”.

Interestingly he barely had any immunological rejection reactions to his new heart...

The earthy Jerusalem is a city with real people who just want to be respected and valued as living human beings and rescued from being swallowed by the rhetoric of politicians or the archetype of holiness or god .

The Israeli Poet Yehuda Amichai, who lived in Jerusalem and dedicated many poems to her, expressed this basic wish in a movingly simple way in his poem “Tourists”.

“Once I sat on the steps by the gate at Davis’s Tower, I placed my two heavy baskets

at my side. A group of tourists was standing around their guide and I became their target maker. “You see that man with the baskets? Just right to his head there’s an arch from the roman period. Just right of his head.” “But he’s moving, he’s moving”! I said to myself : redemption will come only when their guide tells them, “You see That arch from the roman period? It’s not important: but next to it, left and down a bit, there sits a man who’s bought fruit and vegetables for his family. “ (10) Amen.

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