

Reva Mann

Barbeque near the Temple Mount

I walk the twenty minutes from my house, past the Cinemateque, continue towards Jaffa gate, cross the Armenian quarter and then reach the Jewish Quarter where I am invited to a barbeque at my friend Lauren's home.

I feel claustrophobic in the labyrinths of the Jewish ghetto, the winding narrow streets flanked on both sides by buildings that leave only a ribbon of visible twilight. I could never live here. There are too many sacrifices to make in order to reside in this prime location. Dwelling in close proximity to holy sites demands a high level of modesty inside the home. Outside is a tourist trap. Busloads of sightseers hang around the main plaza buying Judaica souvenirs and munching on salt beef sandwiches from Tzaddik's deli. The acoustics in the alleyways magnify a constant chatter that disturbs the Quarter's quiet. But if you ask Lauren why she has chosen to live in this isolated district she will tell you, "So that when the Messiah finally arrives I will have a ringside view."

It is always welcoming to come out through the dark alley of Ha'Omer Street and enter Lauren's luxury boutique apartment. "Shalom," I greet my hostess and her guests who are already seated at the table on the terrace against the backdrop of the ancient city view: hills of pebble gray and camel yellow that always take my breath away. Superior wines have been uncorked and slices of fillet steak and lamb chops marinate in an earthenware bowl.

A sculpture of a dove of peace, inspired by Picasso's masterpiece, has been placed up on the steps leading to the rooftop. Under this piece of artwork sits the artist, my friend Paul Taylor. It is through the wire outline of the bird holding an olive branch in his mouth that I can see the Temple Mount and the golden dome that marks the most controversial site on earth, where, according to Jewish tradition, Abraham planned to sacrifice Isaac and the two tablets inscribed with the Ten Commandments are buried.

Watching the gold-leaf dome glitter in the dusk, I imagine the building of the Third Temple, the pre-requisite for the coming of Messiah. Once it is built, the ritual of sacrificing animals that ceased with the destruction of the second temple in 70 AD will be reinstated and the high Priest will officiate and offer up sheep, cows and doves for atonement of our sins. I scan the horizon and my gaze falls on the mosque and remember Yechezkiel's prophecy that predicts that on this exact spot where Muhammad rose from the rock to the heavens to his Lord, the third temple will be rebuilt. Down the block from the Mount is the Temple Institute where blueprints of temple architecture have already been drawn up, vessels have been reconstructed, clothes of the High Priest have been fashioned according to biblical design and plants have been collected to make incense and saved for the end of days.

Caught up in the wonder of the Old City, I imagine that the steak sizzling on the grill, just a stone's throw from the sacrificial altar in the holy of holies, atones for our sins, that the quality lamb spitting on the fire absolves our transgressions.

The wailing of the muezzin makes it impossible for me to hear what Lauren is saying. She looks excited and I sense she is telling me Messiah is riding up on his white donkey right now. As she is waving a piece of meat on a skewer in the air, I stand up to peek over the ancient walls, but sit back down realizing that redemption has not come and she is only asking "medium rare or well done?"