

## Poems by Yehuda Amichai for Study and Discussion

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Central Synagogue, New York, NY

### **JERUSALEM IS A PORT CITY**

Jerusalem is a port city on the shore of eternity.  
The Temple Mount is a great ship, a pleasure yacht  
In splendor.  
From the portholes of her Wailing Wall, jubilant saints  
Peer like passengers. Hasidim on the pier wave  
Goodbye, yelling hurrah, bon voyage. She  
Is always docking, always embarking.  
And the fences and docks  
And policemen and flags and churches' high masts  
And the mosques and the smokestacks of synagogues and the chanteys  
Of praise and mountain-billows.  
The ram's horn sounds out sunset: one more  
Has set sail.  
Yom Kippur sailors in white uniforms  
Ascend between the ropes and ladders of tried-and-true prayers.  
And the profits of market and gates and golden cap domes:  
Jerusalem is the Venice of God.

### **JERUSALEM IS A SPINNING CAROUSEL**

Jerusalem is a carousel spinning round and round  
from the Old City through every neighborhood and back to the Old.  
And you can't get off. If you jump you're risking your life  
and if you step off when it stops you must pay again  
to get back on for more turns that never will end.  
Instead of painted elephants and horses to ride  
religions go up, down and around on their axes  
to unctuous melodies from the houses of prayer.

Jerusalem is a seesaw: Sometimes I go down,  
to past generations and sometimes up, into the sky,  
then like a child dangling on high, legs swinging, I cry  
I want to get down, Daddy, Daddy, I want to get down,  
Daddy, get me down.  
And like that, all the saints go up into the sky.  
They're like children screaming, Daddy, I want to stay high,  
Daddy don't bring me down, Our Father Our King,  
leave me on high, Our Father Our King!

## **TOURISTS**

Visits of condolence is all we get from them.  
They squat at the Holocaust Memorial,  
They put on grave faces at the Wailing Wall  
And they laugh behind the heavy curtains  
In their hotels.  
They have their pictures taken  
Together with our famous dead  
At Rachel's Tomb and Herzl's Tomb  
And on the top of Ammunition Hill.  
They weep over our sweet boys  
And lust over our tough girls  
And hang up their underwear  
To dry quickly  
In cool, blue bathrooms.

Once I sat on the steps by a gate at David'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 marker.

"You see that man with the baskets? Just right of 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 if their guide tells them, 'You see that arch from the Roman period? It's not important: but next to it, left down and a bit, there sits a man who's bought fruit and vegetables for his family.'"

## **AN ARAB SHEPHERD IS SEARCHING FOR HIS GOAT ON MOUNT ZION**

An Arab shepherd is searching for his goat on Mount Zion and on the opposite mountain I am searching for my little boy. An Arab shepherd and a Jewish father both in their temporary failure. Our voices meet above the Sultan's Pool in the valley between us.

Neither of us wants the child or the goat to get caught in the wheels of the terrible Had Gadya machine.

Afterward we found them among the bushes and our voices came back inside us, laughing and crying.

Searching for a goat or a son has always been the beginning of a new religion in these mountains.

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From Poems of Jerusalem by Yehuda Amichai. Tel Aviv: Schocken Publishing, 1987