

Recognising the positive

Prayer for the Day

Ephraim Borowski (Director, Scottish Council of Jewish Communities)

Broadcast on Radio 4, February 2007

Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem was the centre of Jewish worship until it was destroyed, first by the Babylonians and then by the Romans – the Iraqis and the Americans of their days! Ever since, it has featured as a recurrent theme of Jewish worship: the Fast of Av marks its destruction; the festival of Chanukah celebrates its rededication; and three times every day we pray for its restoration.

The Talmud tells of four of the great Rabbis of the Mishnah, more than 1900 years ago, walking near Jerusalem. As they came to Mount Scopus, they saw a fox emerging from the Holy of Holies.

The others started to weep but Rabbi Akiva laughed. So the others asked him why, and he replied, "Why are you weeping?"

They said, "A place where it was forbidden for people even to enter has now become the haunt of foxes, so how can we not weep?"

Rabbi Akiva explained, "That is just why I am happy. There were two prophecies: the first that Zion shall be ploughed as a field, and the second that there shall yet be old men and old women sitting in the streets of Jerusalem. So long as the pessimistic prophecy had not been fulfilled, I had doubts about the optimistic prophecy, but now I have seen it fulfilled to the letter, I have no doubt the other will also come true."

The others exclaimed, "Akiva, you have comforted us! Akiva, you have comforted us!"

May each of personally be blessed with Rabbi Akiva's capacity to see opportunities where there seem only to be threats, and his colleagues' openness to be persuaded of good where they first saw only evil, and above all may we merit to see peace in our days in Jerusalem, the holy city.