

The Peace of Jerusalem

Thought for the Day

Ephraim Borowski (Director, Scottish Council of Jewish Communities)

Broadcast on Radio Scotland, 28 July 2006

“Alas for how things used to be.” – As the old joke says, even nostalgia isn’t what it once was!

Judaism does a particularly good line on nostalgia: most of our festivals and fasts commemorate specific historical events from the biblical period, between two and four thousand years ago,

This week, Jews throughout the world will mark the two thousand three hundred and ninety-third anniversary of the siege and destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, with fasting and other mourning rituals. That’s almost 400 years before the founding of Christianity.

That makes many centuries of diaspora and longing to return, and a very long time during which the holiness of Jerusalem was recognised and adopted by other faiths. That is the context of one of the sources of today’s conflict in the region, and is why Jews, whatever their political position on that conflict, are so offended by the suggestion that there is no historical connection between Judaism and the city of Jerusalem or the land of Israel.

But what is remarkable is how much co-existence flourishes in the middle of that conflict: each faith community in Jerusalem has autonomy over its own holy places and over matters of personal status; schools, colleges and other projects promoting better relations between the faith communities multiply and flourish; Jewish, Christian and Muslim Israelis live and shop and work together despite the pressures to drive them apart.

The traditional Jewish prayer at this time of year, as we mourn the destruction of the biblical Zion, is that we should see its restoration within our own lifetime. As Jews pray for the peace of Jerusalem, and as throughout the world people of all faiths pray for an end to this current conflict and for a lasting and just peace, let us pray also that Jerusalem should continue to be a beacon of collaboration, integration, and cooperation, and above all that the city of peace should never again be the cause of war.