

“Is Jerusalem ever, or never to be shared?”

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What might ‘*sharing*’ a city mean? Before anyone assumes that I will here be proposing a city-sharing model that a city-planner, a political scientist or a legal expert—all anyway being professions I don’t profess- might present, let me begin instead by mulling over the key word – sharing- as this first jumped to my mind when asked to suggest a title to this talk. Perhaps thinking about models should anyway come after some basic questions are addressed. The one thing I had in mind as I thought of the word ‘sharing’ were children –in this case, my grandchildren- as I would see them bickering with one another over a new toy or a candy, with their parents trying to make peace between them by invoking that word. Trying to understand the power or hold the word seemed to have in these situations -a power given effect by the authoritative source behind it, and which more often than not did the trick- I came to realize there must be several elements that made for a happy conclusion. For example –assuming the object belonged to one of the two children, this child might happen to have her eye on another toy belonging to her sibling, which she now sees an exchange opportunity to play with herself, whether simultaneously, or afterwards. Or, assuming only one object was in dispute, this having been bought for the two children, one or the other of them might –under stern guidance- acquiesce in giving the chance for her sibling to play with it first, now feeling confident that the acknowledged authority (i.e., the parent) has guaranteed that her turn would come next. Here, crying or protestation –her always-ready weapon- can come into play later, she will think, but only if and when she begins to feel that her sibling’s turn has taken too

long, or that the size of the portion she consumed was too excessive. What may be significant to observe in this kind of situation is that the older sibling is more often the one addressed first –one assumes because, among other things, she is expected to be both more able than her sibling to make the necessary exchange calculation in her mind; as well as because she is the one with the competitive edge –in this case, this simply being the potential threat posed by her physical size. I think this has a significant bearing on what I shall be saying later. Of course, parents who resort to the use of this key word in these situations not only wish to bring about calm into their –or their children’s- immediate circumstance, pressing as that may be: they also wish to inculcate in their children a habit that they know would make for a best kind of relationship between them in their future: without summarily castigating them for having this primary ‘grabbing for oneself what one can’ instinct –a basic instinct one cannot altogether ignore- they show them other ways to satisfy it that will account for that instinct in their siblings, thereby creating a reciprocity space for the two that makes for a best arrangement between them. By “best’ the parents mean and hope for a life for their children suffused with love, caring and kindness. Would anyone wish for anything else for their children, or for a happy family? Not surprisingly, we will come across the same lesson being taught at kindergartens, this time the reciprocating habit being inculcated among children from different families in the same class, thereby widening the circle or space of reciprocity further.

What does all this have to do with a city? Well, putting aside for a moment the specificities or identities that come to define us or that we come to define ourselves by as grown-ups, what is a city –I ask myself- if not an enlarged family or kindergarten? You might think that the

underlying parameters governing what the good life is for a city are qualitatively different from those governing a family with children or a kindergarten. But all of these are alike as crucibles containing different lives that seek to flourish, for better or for worse. Imagine two cities, one where a reciprocity state of mind permeates and one where it does not: surely in the second case, you will expect a quarrel breaking out at every traffic light, in every walking alley, at every queue, over any bus seat or any parking meter. Here, if anywhere, that famous dictum validates itself that says that what you expect will happen will in fact make it happen. If you expect someone will be pushing you aside in a queue you will push that person or another aside to get ahead yourself, or at least to keep your place in the queue. In short a city, like a kindergarten, is not a congenial –let alone a best- place to find oneself in, and more particularly to be living in, if it is not one where each of its members feels she or he has a reciprocal edge, that the space one allows for the other is reciprocated somehow or another with the space others will allow one to have.

You may think that politics –that dirty word- somehow trumps everything I said, especially where this city, that is, Jerusalem, is concerned. For here, you might think, something far graver, far more important than the mere living fabric among the people who live in it is at play. On one side, there is a Jewish imperative, for a start; and there is a security imperative to complement the first one –both being the kinds of parameters that govern the real life of grown-ups, that determine its one-sided city-planning policies. On the opposite –or Palestinian- side, likewise at the so-called level of the real life of grown-ups- there are national, religious and quotidian imperatives –all jumbled up in such a way as to be expressed in the unplanned

scrambling for existence by a population that is made to live off the scraps of space left over by the dominant party. These are the parameters, it may be argued, that are and should be preeminent as we come to analyze the constitutional ailments in the city and to propose remedies for these. That may be so – in fact it *is* so. However, even as grown-ups we must not kid ourselves: these ‘loftier’ imperatives aside, at the end of the day our actions remain to be defined either by the ‘grabbing for oneself what one can’ instinct or a reciprocity state of mind. Herein lies the rub. The loftier elements, after all, are mere expressions or rationalizations of these basic instincts or states of mind, and it is these, therefore, that we must not lose sight of as we try to identify the said ailments, or to suggest remedies for them. And in the case of this city, it is the ‘grabbing for oneself’ imperative that is and has been the rule since 1967. This is why the city –looked at from the outside and from within- is in the disfigured state it’s in. I am not here singling the *physical* disfigurement one is struck by: for instance, the westward urban sprawl across the Green line, in contrast with the shape of the chopped up outlying neighborhoods of the city on the eastern side of that line- neighborhoods where Jews and Arabs respectively live in conspicuously well-planned and cramped spaces: indeed, this covers one side of the picture. But disfigurement not only has to do with spatial geography: it has to do equally with living conditions and states of mind. Viewed from this perspective, there is no escaping the ugly contortions one finds *in* the city –which is, nominally after all, *one* city- however pretty the pictures may be that we show it off with. I do not here need to burden you with the dismal numbers that reflect this reality –statistics collected by Israeli agencies - governmental and non-governmental- some of which that have recently been the subject of hot debates in the Knesset, either to cite as reason for positive intervention to alleviate worsening

conditions, or for more decisive surgical policies that might reconstitute harmony and health to one part –that is, the Jewish part- of an enlarged but ailing body. For it is, as said, and has been now for fifty years, a single though dissected body –made even more dissected recently by a wall that now runs along, and even through various neighborhoods in the city. But besides these physical divisions, let me once again highlight the other side of the picture, and to stress that for a city –the whole body- to be healthy it must surely be alike to a harmonious home, or a harmonious kindergarten, where its human fabric has been so aligned that Jew can feel at peace dealing with an Arab as she can feel with a fellow-Jew, and Arab can feel equally at peace dealing with a Jew as she can feel with a fellow-Arab, whether they find themselves walking in the same crowded alley in the old city, sitting side-by-side in a tram or bus, or standing in line at one of the offices of the municipality or Ministry of Interior seeking one service or permit or the other –when, in other words, the state of mind that prevails throughout the city is that of reciprocity rather than of grabbing, of one between equal opportunity share-holders rather than that between full citizens on the one hand who live on the upper floor, and natives on the other hand who live in the basement, and whose historic natal rights have been discarded and switched to become mere residence permits granted them by the other party. Today, if you are a Jew living in an East Jerusalem neighborhood, in the upper floor, neither would your I.D. card show ‘east’ alongside the word ‘Jerusalem’ as your designated residence, nor are you required to process all your paper-work in the one, Arab-only and over-crowded building set up by the Ministry of Interior in East Jerusalem for that purpose, where what you are made to access are *grants* the Government bestows on you, not *rights* you own. If you are a Jew, you are an owner

—even if you moved yesterday from the Bronx. If you are an Arab, you are a tenant —even if you are part of a social fabric that has natal continuity extending back in time.

You might think, by highlighting the disparities in living conditions and spatial divisions, I am discarding or even disavowing Palestinian national claims, that is, sovereignty claims for part or parts of the body aspired to as a Palestinian capital —parts, it might be argued, that are set aside as a potential negotiating card to address those claims. As already said, such politically divided parts did in fact exist for an interlude of twenty years based upon a cease-fire agreement between two warring parties, whether in the city itself or in the country at large, but I don't believe that even were there to be a conclusive peace agreement in the future between them based on partitioning that this would —or should- envisage a sealed border in the city as was the case during those years. It is unrealistic to think otherwise. Besides, since that time, the enlargement of the city boundaries has already rendered the designations East and West misnomers as far as political geography is concerned. More importantly, perhaps, it is hard to see those sovereignty claims being satisfied under conditions where the city's historic heart or its population comes to be given up or dissected into pieces between two sovereignty claimants. Therefore, under whichever of two possible futures, that of peace or of irresolution, and however the city may be physically configured, we can expect that the body we are talking about will in effect remain a single one, which should ideally reflect a harmonious whole, however the synapses of its neuron parts come to be connected or disconnected. To make my point plainer, whereas in other parts of the country physical distances between Jewish and Arab population centers still allow us to look at these as separate entities that can still be

divided between two sovereignties, it is hard to consider the geographic gerrymandering of Arab and Jewish neighborhoods beyond the green line in Jerusalem as constituting a real divide between them, notwithstanding the security walls or valleys that separate some of them from their Jewish neighbors, or the glaring disparity in their respective physical layouts. All a bird-eye's view reveals is one entity, the layout of some neighborhoods in it being spacious, well-planned and executed, while the others fast becoming disheveled and over-populated urban clusters of high-rises pushing themselves to the very edge of an invisible zoning border. Even had that fortunately court-blocked city plan envisaging a major city-waste dumping-ground to be located in the valley separating Z'ayyim's zoning edge from French Hill and Isawiyya been executed, the two sides of the valley would not have come to belong to two distinct cities. You cannot really pretend that two parts do not belong to the same unit by simply dumping waste between them. If we superimpose on this physical picture the demographic fact that, whether in this neighborhood or that both populations belong to the same city, or are so-called 'residents' in it, we cannot but conclude that had Israeli development in the city been symmetric all along –investing, that is, in a reciprocal amount of development effort for Arab neighborhoods- the one city we would now have would be far better suited for whatever future holds for it -whether under one sovereignty or two, or under none. As you can tell, the point here is not the legal one concerning unilateral annexation, expansion of city limits, land confiscations, and urban development of Jewish neighborhoods whether on the western or eastern sides: legal swordsmanship in any case often seems to be just that: rather, the issue being raised here is the more fundamental one about human nature, and about values - about grabbing for oneself as opposed to sharing, or acting solely on the basis that all absorption of,

and confiscations of lands are to serve only a one-sided urban development plan, as opposed to a balanced urban development for the totality of the population, or for the city as a whole. And lest you think I am fingering only the disfigurements in the city that Israel is directly to be blamed for, I have already pointed out with equal concern the frenzied counter-appropriation of the left-overs in city space -of the grabbing for oneself what one can imperative- pursued by my own kind, resulting in the squalid and over-populated neighborhoods that are sprouting wherever we look in what is still called, in defiance of a transformed demographic and infrastructural reality, 'East Jerusalem'. But what else could people bereft of space and means but their own who need a room or house left to do? In effect, the net result is a deadly building competition –deadly, that is, to the city's soul and scape. It is a paradigm of how love for an object, even by two enemies, can smother it. It is the kind of competition that can only be remedied if city planning and governance is informed by the principle of reciprocity rather than by the 'grabbing for oneself' imperative.

I am not denying that one city can make do with a double-standard for its two ethnic populations; or some might devise ingenious ways to disgorge what have become 'outlying' blights to the city's landscape, or demographic lay-out, for example by turning them over to the State to make of them regional councils that are independent of the city, or to a Palestinian sovereignty. But either way there is no escaping the overarching reality –a reality consciously produced by Israel itself over the past 50 years- that what we are confronted with in any case is nothing other than a single but disproportionately overgrown child whom we might now wish to dissect into parts or whose disproportionate physical development we may simply decide to



turn a blind eye to. This, when the child itself –the city- cries out for harmony –both in regard to its physical form as well as in regard to its psychological well-being.

In terms of the kind of life we should look for people to have, a more apt conclusion of my earlier ramblings concerning sharing and reciprocity versus sovereignty claims –whether for the country at large but more specifically for the city- would be that a city's (but even a State's) social well-being –the so-called 'good life' political philosophers tell us since Aristotle what States are *for*- must surely come at the top of our priority ladder, and must not, at any rate, be trampled upon by other claims. We have hopefully come far enough in our histories to be able to see matters more comprehensively, and to feel aghast therefore at the injustices and discriminatory disparities in what we grew up to believe were emblematic of civilized cities. We know, more than before, that cities are not made special by their architectural designs or state-of-the-art-institutions as they are by the kind of *life* people living in them have. In retrospect, or even before God, Israel cannot boast of a 'redeemed' city where a part of its population is blatantly and systematically being discriminated against. I must add that this fundamental imbalance is not compensated for by that silver lining of benefits that must be recognized—in health and social welfare, as well as in employment- that Arab Jerusalemites are given access to under Israeli rule, and that are denied to Palestinians in areas that were not annexed by Israel following the 1967 war.

Since the major thrust of my talk so far has been about planning, whether for form or for content, it is only natural that I should say a few words also about the city's governance.

Palestinians are often blamed, perhaps rightly so, for having been disinclined to share in the city's governance –what might arguably have been an essential balancing force to a one-sided trajectory in the city's development. I add the modifier 'perhaps' because, from the point of view of politics, chances are that the municipal council where they would have represented their electoral public would in all likelihood have been a replica of the 'quarreling siblings' syndrome –where, that is, an authoritative source imposing the principle of reciprocity would have had at all times been required for truly balanced rather than majority decisions to be taken: for example, imagine for a second how representatives of residents of Silwan/Wadi Hilweh would have reacted to the plan by representatives of the Elad company- a plan effectively to displace them by establishing an embodied memorialization of the Jewish narrative in that same location. The deed is already half-done, but it is a paradigm of imposing a conqueror's project onto a conquered population, with all that this entails, that puts to rest any dream about a congenial council debate that may have taken place over the issue. Even so, the potentially ameliorating effect of a Palestinian component at the municipal level cannot be forthrightly discounted. But I would contend that a reciprocity-informed authoritative source if this existed –in this case the Mayor- could have made, and still could make, a much more significant difference even in the absence of a Palestinian component in the city council. That said, it could therefore be argued that electoral considerations also count, and would surely have made a prospective Mayor more attuned to the needs of a disaffected public. So, whether physically present in the municipal council or not, Palestinians could still in the past have made an electoral difference, as they still surely can. This observation compels us to shift our focus as we seek to find remedies: cannot it be the case that the ball is in the weaker sibling's court? The

answer is that this may well be the case, but that sibling has to reach the point where she finally comes face to face with the fact that while this is a game with a stronger party where her chances of failure far outnumber those for success, yet this is a game well-worth the risk of taking even for minimal gains; or –looked at from the opposite end- that this is a game it ceases to make sense not to play, regardless of outcome. This situation –considered from whichever end- is not a simple one to be faced: for Palestinian Jerusalemites to face it involves a transformation in their political state of mind –coming to consider that this a politically correct or a pragmatically inevitable procedure to act upon. This is a transformation which involves coming finally to see that a *collective* action to advance their quotidian interests does not conflict with their national sentiments and aspirations, even though it constitutes a formal break with the political institutions which represent those sentiments and aspirations. Perhaps, with almost two thirds of its population by now born under Israeli rule, and one third under eighteen years of age, this transformation is bound to happen some time, sooner or later, barring major changes in the political contours of the region, with or without interludes of violent tremors, and with or without an official blessing from those political institutions. That said, one may still wonder whether even so the stronger sibling –assuming positive, or reciprocally motivated intentions - cannot find ways to encourage the weaker sibling to engage in the game –alike, for example, to the way a grown-up seasoned tennis player might encourage a novice to return the ball. Might not a reciprocally-minded Mayor be able to facilitate the maturation of that process of transformation we said was required for a paradigm shift? Think, for example, of a radical action by this Mayor to institute a whole Arabic department under his wing, one where its Arab employees would be responsible for dealing

with all the municipal functions and services normally accessed by Arab clients through current channels, all the way down to the traffic police. This would not be a 'neighborhood councils' initiative, defined by areas; nor a separate municipal council, cutting areas off Jerusalem: rather, it would be a population-sensitive sub-structure of the municipality, answerable directly to the Mayor, and coordinated at each tier with the respectively relevant departments in that municipality. One could think of it as a mini-municipality –a shadow re-institution of the one disbanded by Israel after '67. Arguably, such a paradigm change may turn out to be just what is needed for helping bring about that afore-said transformation –where the Arab population may become enticed as a second step to engage more actively in the game through electoral participation. This, one might add, would initiate a process that will gather the scattered parts into a single body, or into an organism that is harmonious both in shape and life, without prejudice to any future solution –including a divided or shared sovereignty- should one finally come about. But here, I must again point out, we need to broaden our focus of attention to include the actions or inactions of the other side: the older sibling, the one with the executive edge, and who is surely more in a position to help institute a reciprocity state of mind than her weaker sibling can, must herself be informed by a reciprocity state of mind rather than by a grabbing for oneself what one can instinct.

The title of my talk was formulated as a question –whether Jerusalem can or cannot be shared. 'Cannot' here is not meant as the modal opposite of 'can', but as a time-index expressing the sense that matters which *are* possible may *never* happen. Indeed, I have been trying to present the case so far that sharing Jerusalem is possible, that this can be done. On the other hand, I

have also been trying to explain the conditions that are needed to make that happen - conditions that may simply not be realized. Regarding these –the grabbing for oneself and the reciprocity- I tried to distinguish them from what we come to dress them with –the contents of our identity-affiliations (the larger selves which we come as individuals to identify ourselves with), and the fixity or rigidity of these identities –for example, seeing oneself as a Zionist or a nationalist. Let me therefore conclude this talk with a word or two about the two-way relationship between these two.

I believe we have ample proof that even in this benighted conflict both Palestinians and Israelis, by and large, have expressed their willingness and ability to reconfigure their larger identities while at the same time maintaining a solid sense of their self-identity within that reconfigured definition. Starting off believing their Zionism and Palestinian nationalism are exclusive one of the other, they both came at one time to reconfigure the space to themselves informed by that identity to become one that allows space for the other. This tells us that we are not determinately enslaved by the larger identities –those grown-up definitions- we describe ourselves by. We can still be taught the lesson we were taught as children: that giving space for the other is necessary for living the good life. It is not therefore insane to believe that, with benevolent and committed guidance even by the enlightened few, the many can be helped to cultivate a reciprocity state of mind, and a harmoniously shared city.

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