

“Thousands of years passed, and the memory of David’s harp became only a distant dream from a long-ago time. Only the legends, the stories and the words of the psalms remained.”

“AT MIDNIGHT, I WILL RISE TO GIVE THANKS TO THEE” (PSALM 119:62). “A HARP WAS HUNG ABOVE DAVID’S BED. WHEN MIDNIGHT ARRIVED, THE NORTH WIND BLEW UPON THE HARP, AND THE HARP BEGAN TO PLAY ALONE.

“AND DAVID AROSE TO SING PRAISES TO G-D...” (MIDRASH).

Arising at midnight while the earth was silent and still, King David would place his small wooden harp over his heart and gently put his ear to the wood. As he began to pluck the strings with his fingers, the vibrations echoed through the harp and into his heart, shaking loose the klippa of distance between himself and G-d.

Closing his eyes, he would begin to play whatever music came to him, thoughts and words moving through his mind in harmony with the melodies. This music came in waves from within his soul and overflowed onto the strings of the harp, and from there out into the universe. He became one with the music, and one with G-d. King David’s personal prayer became *Shir* – Song, the sweetest form of devotion and joy.

As a shepherd long before he became Israel’s king, David had been known as “the sweet singer of Israel.” His psalms were personal songs of faith and love in the darkest times of his life as well as the grandest. They were composed from the depths of his heart, and fortunately their words were written into the Bible, where we can read them every day.

But what about the music? Can you imagine what it would be like to hear a recording of King David himself playing his harp and singing the psalms?

The music, too, survived – for a while. King David’s special melodies and words went on to be taught to the Levites who played in the orchestra of the Holy Temple. They were sung and played faithfully for hundreds of years, at least twice every day.

In the Temple courtyard, small groups of Levite children learned to play on their harps and lyres and sing the *Shira* of David’s psalms. No Temple services could happen without this music. Prayer, prophesy, healing, meditation and joy were its attributes. Almost every family had a harp at home, to be played on such joyful occasions as weddings, homecomings, festivals and holidays. The technique was simple; anyone could play it beautifully and easily.

The gentle, heavenly sounds of the harp were as much a part of life as life itself, floating through the Jerusalem air like fluffy clouds on a summer’s day.

And then came the dark night of exile.

“By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion. We hung up our harps on the willow trees...” (Psalm 137)

The harps were so intrinsically connected to Israel, to Jerusalem and to the Temple that when we went into Babylonian exile they had to be left behind. They were only instruments of joy, not to be played in times of sorrow.

When the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar ordered the harp players

to play their harps and entertain him, they refused, crying, “How can we sing the Lord’s Song in a strange land?” And they actually broke their fingers so as not to be able to do such a thing.

Instead they hung their harps on the willow trees and turned off the light of this special kind of music in the Holy Land.

The sweet sound of the harp of David became silent.

Thousands of years passed, and the memory of David’s harp became only a distant dream from a long-ago time. Only the legends,

the stories and the words of the psalms remained.

As sometimes happens after long periods of time, the instruments changed form. The kinnor (lyre) gradually changed into a violin, and the nevel (harp) evolved into the large orchestra harp we have today, complete with gold leaf overlay and pedals.

These are both very beautiful instruments with amazing sounds, but they are connected no longer to the intention and purpose of the original harps of Jerusalem, which were tools for prayer and transformation.

As the remnant of the Jewish people wandered from place to place, we did not have our soul instruments to play when special occasions arose. So we borrowed instruments, the way people borrow clothes when they have none of their own. And the more talented among us learned to make music on them, and it was good music.

But though the new instruments made lovely sounds, they were not the same. The original pure song had been distorted by time and distance, and most of the original melodies were long forgotten or changed.

So we adapted. We adjusted to a new reality, as our memory of the ancestral music of King David, the Temple and the prophets became a faint echo from the past.

“Give thanks to Hashem for He is good, for His kindness endures forever...” (Psalm 107)

But sometimes even a long-forgotten memory can pierce the darkness of distance and time.

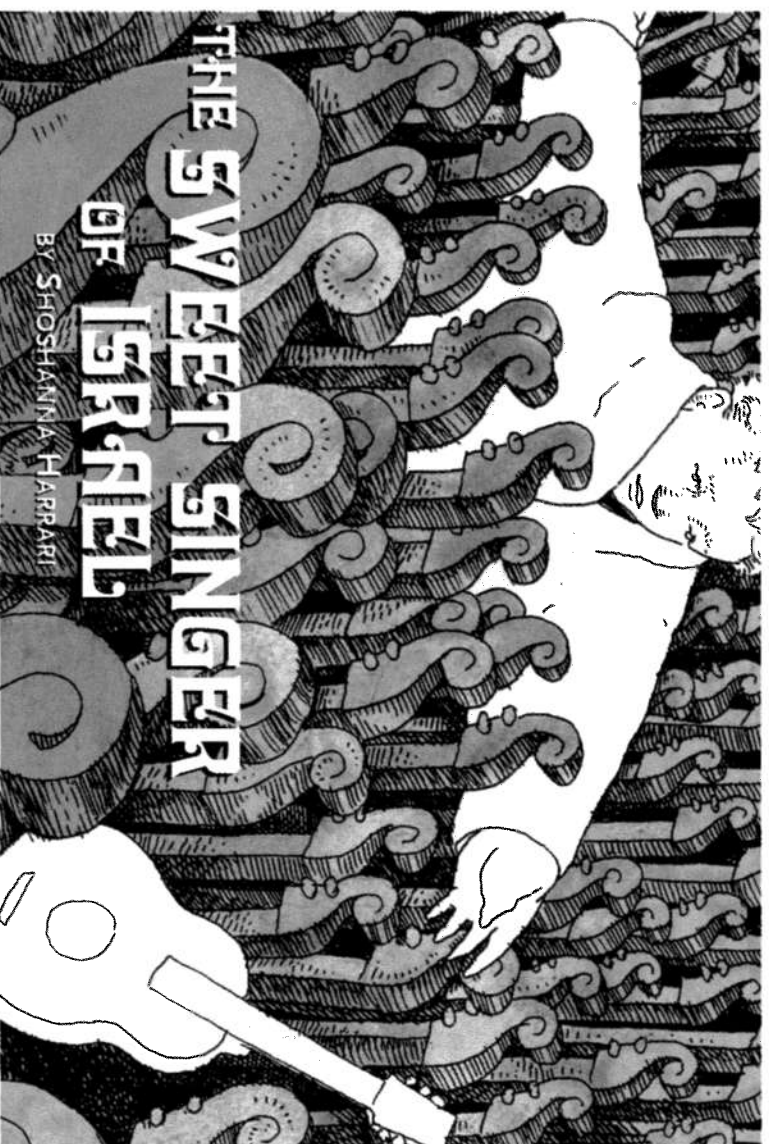
By chance more than design, the harp of David has been taken off the willow trees and is being built again in Jerusalem, preparing the way for its future and its original intention, once more an instrument of personal prayer and transformation.

Already the sweet sound of the harp can again be heard through the streets of Jerusalem, and beyond. Perhaps some of the melodies of King David are also returning to our weddings and festivals, unbeknownst even to ourselves, through the new songs that are emerging from our hearts.

If we really listen, we can almost hear it... the footsteps of the Mashiach, and his songs of joy ...

...and King David arose at midnight to sing praises to G-d.

Shoshanna and Michal Harrari have a small biblical harp workshop near Jerusalem. They can be reached through their web site www.harrariharps.com



BEFORE I LEFT CHICAGO

critic Harold Rosenberg me, “Going to Jerusalem wondering whether pecking freely? You’ve got to ding, they’ll talk your head. He spoke as a Jew to a about Jewish powers of in flight, if the door of plane comes open you sucked into space. Her Jerusalem, when you step apartment door behind fall into a gale of convective exposition, argument, harangue, analysis, the expostulation, threat, a prophecy. From diplomacy hear cagey explanation: responsible persons, candid and grudging statement rephrasing and amendment questions: from parents and children, deadly dialogue, passionate speech denunciation of Western Europe, of Russia, of America listen carefully, closely, closer than I’ve ever lived my life, utterly attentive often feel that I have drifted into a shoreless sea.

The subject of all this: ultimately, survival – the revival of the decent society in Israel within a few decades. At first this is grasp because the setting civilized. You are in a city many another – well, in Jerusalem is the one ancient city I’ve ever seen whose antiquities are displayed as relics but are use. Still, the city is a city with modern utilities shop in supermarkets, good morning to friend telephone, you hear symphonies on the radio suddenly the music is a terrorist bomb is reported new explosion outside shop on the Jaffa Road young people killed an eight more wounded. I you put down your civil drink. Uneasy, you go your civilized dinner. Bombs are exploding everywhere. Dynamite has just been in London; the difference that when a bomb goes West End restaurant the mental right of England is not in dispute.