

JERUSALEM: MULTICULTURAL PSYCHOHISTORY AND HEALING

Response of Constance L. Benson to Habibeh Rahim

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When placed in the framework of depth psychology, the subject matter of Prof. Rahim's presentation can be understood in terms of the projection of unconscious complexes onto sacred objects, the City of Jerusalem being one such object. According to Erich Neumann in *Depth Psychology and a New Ethic*, such projections have historically underpinned all the world's religions, but increasingly people today are withdrawing such projections, resulting in a "loss of faith," on the one hand, and new possibilities for individuation, on the other.

Karen Armstrong in *A History of God* has pointed out that our disillusionment with traditional religiosity is really nothing new, and that the Abrahamic traditions, which have largely ossified today into ethnocentric ideologies, were iconoclastic in their historical origins and were even denounced as atheistic by earlier generations of believers. I want to develop this point in the case of Christianity, with special reference to the topic of Jerusalem. Leaving aside debates about "the historical Jesus," I will take as my starting point some teachings and stories attributed to the protagonist of the four Christian Gospels, interpreted in light of what is now known about the historical context in which these stories were written. What do these teachings and stories say concerning the city of Jerusalem?

In Jesus' time there was religious conflict between Jews and Samaritans over where to worship God. The Samaritans were a mixed remnant from what had been the northern Kingdom of Israel before the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities. Before these captivities, Jews living in the Northern Kingdom worshipped at shrines in the north (Samaria), while Jews in the Southern Kingdom (Judah) worshipped at Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem, which was then destroyed by the Babylonians. After the exile, returning Jewish elites led by Ezra and Nehemiah built a Second Temple in Jerusalem and laid claim to a kind of religious monopoly for this center of worship that cast the Jews of the north (that is, the Samaritans) as heretics. This aggrandizement of the Jerusalem Temple culminated in its massive physical expansion under King Herod the Great.

Jesus challenged this Jerusalem-centric understanding of Judaism in two important stories. In one of them, he is described as having a conversation alone with a Samaritan woman at Jacob's well [John 4:1-30] When his disciples joined him, they were shocked that Jesus was having a serious exchange with a woman and especially, a Samaritan woman. When the woman raised the disagreement between Jews and Samaritans concerning where to worship God, Jesus simply waived aside the issue as non-essential.

The second story describes a conversation Jesus had with a Jewish religious teacher about the meaning of the injunction in Torah to "Love your neighbor as yourself." [Luke 10: 25-37] Jesus responds to the teacher's question, "Who is my neighbor?" with his famous story of the Good Samaritan. A man had been robbed and left for dead by the side of a road. Of three men who passed by, a priest and a Levite ignored his plight and kept walking. The third traveler, a Samaritan, had compassion on the man, picked him up, dressed his wounds, and brought him to a nearby inn where he paid for his recovery. Jesus then asked: of these three, which one acted like a good neighbor? This story shattered Jewish stereotypes about Samaritans by commending one of them as a true practitioner of Jewish law, more authentic than some Jewish clergy.

Erich Neumann argued that for humanity to overcome intolerance and violence, each of us must take responsibility for our own unconscious destructiveness—our "shadow"—and to stop projecting it onto the "other." [E. Neumann, *Depth Psychology and a New Ethic*, Shambala, 1969.] Interestingly, the same message is found in the teaching of Jesus against a judgmental attitude: "First take the log out of your own eye, then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye." [Matthew 7: 1-5]. Here, where religious teaching meets depth psychology, healing of the self and our fragmented world can occur.