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## **Answers to Many Questions**

**Rachel Berghash**

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My Life In And Out of Jerusalem*" (Sunstone Press)**

I had no intention of writing a memoir. I started writing a poem about Jerusalem; the lines became longer. After two or three lines, I'd start a new paragraph. Soon I became aware of a voice emerging that sought to express events and places where joy and sadness intertwine.

When I began writing about my father, with Jerusalem as background, I realized I was writing a memoir, and giving my parents a voice. I found I resonated to their suffering, growing up poor and being hungry as children, and lacking formal educations.

My father, a fifth-generation Ashkenasic Jerusalemite, grew up among Arabs and Jews in the Old City, and spoke Arabic fluently. As a child, I watched him with his Arab customers in his store, and began to sense a kinship between them. This and other experiences in Jerusalem seeded my attraction to "otherness."

During my youth my parents imposed a plethora of Jewish religious do's and don'ts that later became a burden. My mother was dogmatic; my father more open-minded. To some extent, he was able to mitigate her dogmatism.

Having been born and raised in Jerusalem, there is not a city in the world in which I feel more at home. I know every street, every corner – the people, the ambience, the atmosphere, are so familiar. Yet for most of my adult life, I have not lived there.

New York is where I raised children, and where I do my work. I lead seminars; I write essays and poetry. As far as personal growth is concerned, I was born intellectually and spiritually in New York.

Our family has a history of going back and forth. My mother, who was raised in New York, immigrated to Israel; I left Israel for New York and have visited Jerusalem again and again. My elder son left New York and settled in Israel.

The same with religion – I abandoned it; our sons returned to it. Our home in New York was suffused with ideas and stories from the great religions, and I believe our kids picked it up then went their own way.

At first when studying Christianity and Buddhism, I was apprehensive that the important people from my past would disapprove. But the realization that all religions meet at their highest spiritual level mitigated my fear.

Some years later, I began to attend the Carlebach shul in New York, which helped me finally return and get closer to my own religion.

I hope to validate other people's experiences by sharing my own – pain, sorrow, and joy, in relationships and work. I also want to show that an interior life has more than supported me through difficulties – it has made my life rich and worth living.

It was rewarding to give shape and form to the defining elements of my life. The book was my friend; I confided in it. We had a hard time separating!

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