

Afterword by Rabbi Arthur Green



Brother Leo (abbot, 1952-1969), brother Richard (prior, 1998-), brother John (prior, 1964-1998). "Monasticism is a living, not a dead, thing. It moves with the times, because the Rule is not a dead letter, but an inspired work, conveying the Spirit...in [it] a decisive step was taken towards the fraternal relationship of brothers."

Many years ago, my teacher and friend Rabbi Zalman Schacter taught me that a deeper dialogue between Jews and Christians, one for which we both longed, should focus around the Psalms. When we returned to conversations about this theme over the years, we both thought immediately of the beautiful psalm chanting we had heard at Weston and of some precious hours of conversation with the brothers there. It is for this reason that I turn to the Psalter as a text for these brief remarks in memory of Father/Brother Leo Rudloff, may his memory be a blessing. I choose to focus on Psalms 122 and 36 (by our count, the Catholic Bible numbers may differ slightly), for reasons that will be clear to the reader of brother John's narrative.

*I rejoiced when they said to me:
Let us go to the house of the Lord.*

Where, indeed, is the "House of the Lord?" This wonderful book is the life story of a man devoted to the journey to God's house, but paying a great price for having had more than one answer to the seemingly simple and obvious question. Why,

God's house is in Jerusalem, of course. The Psalmist goes on to say it quite clearly:

Our feet stood inside your gates, O Jerusalem.

In this case, it was in fact "just outside your gates," the Dormition Abbey being a few steps from the Zion Gate, the way into the Old City that leads through the Jewish Quarter to the Temple Mount. It was no accident that Leo Rudloff was so devoted to a church positioned just that way. His way to "God's House" was increasingly one of gaining familiarity with those realms of his own soul and our conjoined spiritual traditions that may be called "the Jewish Quarter." His vision of a Christian house of prayer so close to the Jewish side of that great center where the three faiths meet and struggle was important and unique. Unlike so many of the Holy Land Christians, engaged in turf-battles with one another and locked in insular struggles each to preserve its own distinctive truth-claims, Brother Leo conceived of a Christian presence open to others and welcoming pilgrims and seekers of all sorts. In contrast to the rather chilly reception given to Israeli statehood by many in the Christian world, Leo Rudloff wanted his abbey to exist comfortably within the State of Israel, encouraging his brothers to learn Hebrew and incorporate it in their worship, as well as to house authentic dialogue between Jews and Christians.

But the Dormition was not the only "House of the Lord" in Brother Leo's life. In his beloved Weston, he was able to build God's house much more as he wanted it to be: simple in both architecture and liturgy, down-to-earth in its connection to physical labor and agriculture, and closer to egalitarian in the relationships between abbot and brothers, as is so well documented here. All of these were problematic in Jerusalem, perhaps overly rich in traditions and therefore hard to reshape. In

Vermont the only tradition was simplicity itself! No wonder this man, so much a person of Vatican II, was attracted to this house of God as well as the other.

He also understood that the inner peace of monastic devotion was much dependent on the surrounding environment.

*Rebuilt Jerusalem is like a city joined together;
there the tribes come as pilgrims,
the tribes of the Lord.*

But Jerusalem in all the years that Leo Rudloff knew and loved it was not "like a city joined together." In the early years of his stays there, before 1967, it was indeed a physically divided city, separated by walls of concrete and barbed wire, with hostile soldiers on each side of the divide. Indeed, the Dormition was one of those rare places within Israeli Jerusalem from which one could "peer through the wall (see Cant. 2:9)" over to the Old City with its many sacred sites. It seemed both like a few feet and a thousand miles away, separated by hostility and distrust. After 1967, the physical barriers came down and Israel rightfully reclaimed the Jewish Quarter. In the early years, it seemed that indeed there might be a coming together here of Israelis and Arabs, Jews, Christians, and Muslims. Alas, that was not to be. The Israeli victors soon fell victim to the turf-war mentality, claiming and settling ever more than should have been permitted. Muslims, deeply threatened by an Israeli rule that was theologically as well as politically uncomfortable for them, remained ever hostile. Christians witnessed a rising tide of emigration by their local communicants, felt mostly helpless to mediate in what was mostly a Jewish/Muslim struggle, and so fell back upon protecting their own historical rights and mini-territorial claims. This was hardly a setting for the sort of "pilgrims" that Leo Rudloff might have had in mind. One

comes to Jerusalem today for seminars on protracted violence more than for inner peace. For all that, however, his love of the Holy City did not diminish, and he continued to

pray for the peace of Jerusalem.

May those who love you find tranquility.

More than many others, Brother Leo also understood that peace, a tranquility within the heart, depended upon a family or community in which they could be properly fostered. This meant, in the monastic context, a community of true love among brothers, joined to one another by their love of God and devotion to God's service. Therefore, the Psalm concludes first with

For the sake of my brothers and friends

and only then goes on to

For the sake of the House of the Lord our God.

It is brotherhood and friendship that make a place in "the House of the Lord our God." This Leo founded and found at Weston, and it was because of this that the Weston Priory has indeed thrived over these stormy decades in the life of the church and has achieved renown as a House of God that is loved and respected by so many.

It is our Jewish custom, when donning our *tallit* or prayer-shawl for morning prayers (that should indeed take place at dawn!), to cover our face with the shawl for a moment of private devotion, during which we recite the following verses from Psalm 36:8–10:

How precious is your loving kindness, O God!

Humans find shelter in the shadow of your wings.

They are sated by the rich feast of Your house;

You give them drink from the streams of your Eden,

With you is the font of light;

In Your light we see light.

Draw Your compassion toward those who know You

And Your beneficence on the upright of heart.

These verses are chosen for this liturgical moment probably because of their second line. The Jew wrapped in a *tallit* is to feel the "shelter in the shadow of Your wings" as a real moment of divine presence. But there is much more to them as well. The reality of God's *hesed* (rendered here as "lovingkindness" and "compassion," but also translatable as "grace") is their central theme. This *hesed* is the great gift of God that sustains us through our life's journey. It is a generous and inexhaustible flow of blessing, given to us without judgment, without measure of how deserving we are to receive it. The challenge to us implicit in this gift is that we pass it on to others, that we share it in the human community and with all God's creatures in the same spirit of non-judgmental giving.

"How precious is Your lovingkindness" indeed, when we are able to give it as a gift to all those we encounter. We are sheltered in God's wings so that we can give God's love to others, allowing all to be "sated by the rich feast of Your house." Here we have another description of God's house. It is a place of rich feasting, not in the material sense, of course, but in the nurturing of the spirit. There the great gifts that mystics of all ages have known, the streams of Eden's rivers, and the rays of God's own shining light are to be found in abundance.

It is about the building of such a house, and the life and struggles of its builder, that you have read in this volume. Go forth and build as well.

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A BENEDICTINE LEGACY OF PEACE

the life of Abbot Leo A. Rudloff

by Brother John Hammond
Monk of Weston Priory

Foreword by Eugene J. Fisher Ph.D.
Afterword by Rabbi Arthur Green

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