

September - December, 2015

The Sherman Weather Report: *Getting There*

As the story goes, a businessman lost in the back roads of Maine enters a tiny town and pulls his Lexus to the shoulder outside a hardware store, where two lanky and laconic old farmers are resting on a bench. He rolls down his window and asks for directions to his destination in a nearby town, and they turn to each other to confer with sober glances, and then one of them turns back to him and says, “You can’t get there from here.”



“Getting There” became for me an essay that starts in the hot, straight streets of Albuquerque—103 degrees—but finds itself in the fibrous country roads of Pennsylvania—a little muggy—twisting its way toward a destination almost impossible to describe in definable steps, although *two* little female navigator robot voices are trying to do so, not always agreeing, which is why a story called “Getting There” morphs itself into existence, built on the tension between a city planned out by under-employed civil engineers of the Great Depression, then built in a post-war rush, the whole northeast residential quadrant of it laid out in half mile NSEW squares, flat roofed houses on 100 foot lots with 5 foot cement block walls . . . and these lovely waltzing cow-path roads romancing themselves toward nowhere in particular, the next farm, your favorite neighbor, perhaps? It is a fact that to have written down the turns would take more paper than this essay, and that no respectable highway covers any part of the route in a helpful way, even though we were in that great splash of highways known as Boshwash, where one of five Americans live and drive a billion cars. No highway helps, not if we are coming from the Eastern Shore of Maryland to Lancaster Pennsylvania.

We were in fact going to the *Sight and Sound* theatre near Lancaster, and the story called “Getting There” exists in the mind of the grandfather of a sixteen year old who is riding in the back seat very quietly. The story is told, *if* it exists, in the quiet thoughts of that sixteen year old, commenting on the bizarre conversations of the old guy with the other family members in the car. The young man’s special emphasis is the *two* smart phones, the *two* guiding robot lady voices, the wrong turn, (the *wrong* Sight and Sound!) getting lost in the cornfields. . . all so familiar.

But of course that story does not exist, except in my head, where I also think about a German philosopher named Heidegger, considered brilliant but unfathomable, who was all about existence—an Existentialist—and was known for a phrase, *Dasein*, which means “being there.” But we are not there yet, hence my title. These

days, we have a new usage of “existential,” referring to the risk faced by the small nation that did arrive at its destination and was asked to make a u-turn. Heidegger made huge wrong turns, as detailed (obscurely) in the film *Hannah Arendt*, which is worth seeing just for the challenge of sorting out the points of view, the twisted and torn value judgments at work there. If you want to be sure you do not know where you are going, watch this film. Ask yourself who dreamed up the mean baddie Israeli agents who hassle the little Jewish girl who covered the Eichmann trial the way she did and had been the lover of this anti-Semitic philosopher, the great Heidegger. No doubt my sixteen year old, given the chance, would have a heyday with these tangled threads, in his quiet way, as his grandfather was having a heyday with the twisted roads of Pennsylvania. .

Heidegger did not claim to *be there*, as if he had *arrived*, but to live in some smokily sensed significance of *being*, a reality he could express only in invented German words. I wondered why he did not, like Augustine, rejoice in the Being who is the God of creation; an easy question; he was not saved; he was stuck in guilt. I wanted to do my dissertation on it, but my professors dismissed the idea quickly. No one can learn anything so simple (9 words) and important, or even study it laboriously enough to justify a dissertation. So I studied Nietzsche, who also was not saved, stuck in guilt.

You know I am not a relativist, a skeptic, a liberal, a cynic, or a nihilist, so I think there is a way to have arrived, but we need to be careful. Alan Watts wrote a nifty little book called *This Is It*, a fascinated American youth culture Buddhism, which I soon found futile. What he found was not ‘it’. I imagine at some stage of life he thought about a sequel, *There it Went!* Later he wrote *Nothingness: The Essence of Alan Watts*. The title describes the problem exactly. The final test was what his death was like. But there *is* an answer, and a year or two after reading Watts I found Jesus, more real now than ever, after 46.5 years (Oct. 9) and, should things get difficult, all the more so. I don’t think I’ll ever have to say “There it Went” about life in Jesus.

We did *arrive* in Tel Aviv on September 24, and in spite of being cautious about thinking one has *arrived*, I did have three special moments in Israel and Jerusalem. If you want to get serious about *Getting There*, I suggest Jerusalem. Roving desperate jihadists were stabbing Jews while we were there, and getting shot themselves, so if one of those had happened upon us in the Old City, then we might really know what *getting there* is about. Or if we were tortured and beheaded by ISIS in Syria, as I was reading about this morning. In a strange contrast, Sylvia and I were in good company, very well fed, mostly healthy, delighted with The Land and Jerusalem, and *happy*.

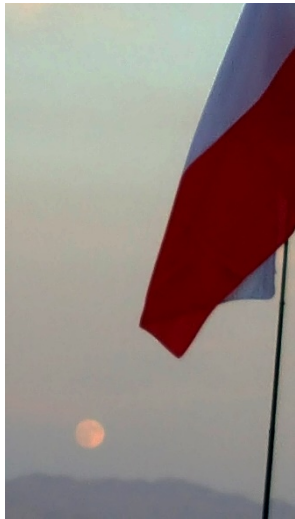
In these special moments, I could hardly imagine a time and place in the world better than this, almost as if I were to say, *This is It*. But here the “It” is a facet of the same jewel I have been learning about for 46.5 years, the sovereign intention of God to bless the world. It is the Bible church gospel of decades past, unchanged, and it is the Messianic vision of the future of Israel, appearing on every horizon. We study and grow, and God’s good intentions keep reappearing, getting simpler, much too simple for a dissertation.

The first moment is seen best at Ein Gedi, the desert site of the opening night of the International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem (ICEJ) Feast of Tabernacles. But this moment gathered itself together from several times and places. First we spent 10 hours in Ben Gurion airport, waiting for our group and waiting out their difficulties with delays and missing luggage. But the Arrivals Hall in Ben Gurion is a special place. Upstairs you have all the stress and bustle and impersonal glitz of a major airport. But the Arrivals Hall is quiet, with places to sit and a few useful shops; at its center large columns mark out a circle into which deplaning travelers are released, surrounded by those who have come to greet them, some strangers, holding signs.



The airport is 100% international, so there are no bored businessmen wishing they didn't have another leg in their flights home. Israelis are returning from the world, and visitors are touching holy ground for the first time, and a few are Jews making *aliah*. You could make glorious candid shots of the greetings there, though I tried not to steal these moments for myself. Loved ones are finding the arms that want to hold them, and the Nations are coming to Zion!

Many of those colorful arrivals were going to the ICEJ Feast of Tabernacles, opening three days later at Ein Gedi, a resort town in the desert alongside the Dead Sea. We left late that night with our new tour group and



spent three days in the Galilee, and then we drove down the Jordan valley from the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea. We saw Masada and Qumran, then arrived at Ein Gedi in the late afternoon of September 27th, as Sukkot was about to begin. This "Arrivals Hall" was painted wide and bright in the watercolors of land and sky—bright tans and blues, and the reddish hills of Moab—and in the wild colors of a hundred tour buses, with their colorful people in their cheerful throngs. South America, especially Brazil, and Africa and the Far East brought their many-colored garments and their songs. Spotlights turned the palms red and green, and we waved our banners and danced to the loud music. The full moon rose big and pale in the dusky sky above the hills of Jordan.



Tabernacles or Sukkot is the last of the three fall feasts on the Hebrew calendar. Rosh Hoshana, Yom Kippur, and Sukkot come together quickly with the new moon that brings in Tishrei and the New Year (September 13), and then the full moon that starts the eight days of Sukkot. At Ein Gedi, the full moon rose and Sukkot began, and, as Christians teachers might tell you, at this time and place the Church age ends, and the "ingathering" of the nations begins. If you see the feast days in Christian perspective, you can say that Passover and First Fruits and Pentecost have been fulfilled by Messiah, and then the long months of summer, like the long millennia of the Church age, have no feasts, but await Messiah, and the fulfillment of the fall feasts.

When four blood moons (eclipses) occur on Jewish holidays in two years, then maybe God has the world's attention regarding his good intentions. Maybe. I don't jump too quickly into supernatural expectations. The blood moons are remarkable, but the fact they fell on Jewish feasts is not a statistical miracle, since these Jewish holidays occur on full moons (on the 14th day), and all eclipses happen on full moons. So here sits Sherman, in the desert alongside the Dead Sea, eating a pretty good picnic meal, cooling off finally with the breeze that sprang up, thinking very naturally, talking down the enormity of the setting. Yet he said there is no other place or time he would choose to be.



I could tell you that our worship there was awesome, there beneath the rising full moon and the waving banners and spotlights, but actually it was not, from where I sat. The message did little for me. It introduced the theme, “Reformation” in short bursts of translated preaching, but I wanted to get some *content*, as I grumbled to myself. Others in our tour was good, but it was a long our group was missing the ticket, and the gatekeepers did her to return to the building tickets—somewhere out there Egypt—well, we grumbled and the gate lady said she can’t for the next month, in my understand. As we ate we could see untold thousands still in line outside the gates, and when the musicians were singing “Open the Gates” over and over again, very worshipfully, I found myself wondering why they did not just open the gates and forget all those silly tickets. Of course, that would have overwhelmed the food tables . . . so who am I? I’m just grumbler who knows little about how to run a feast. . .



were not too excited. The food line to get in, and when one of purple end of her three-part not just wave her in but wanted where our guide had picked up between the Sinai peninsula and and urged them to just let her in, do that, and I said “why not?” head. She did get in, I

. . . which is an example of something I saw everywhere among these humans converging on Israel for the Feast of Tabernacles: our carnality. I enjoyed our blessed group of imperfect people, and I wasn’t depressed or grouchy. (If I was grouchy, I have already forgotten it, conveniently . . . except for our hot, up-and-down walk around a *long* block, just out of sight of the hotel, the smart phone not quite smart enough.) We both were blessed by wonderful sights and sounds and messages, and people to enjoy. Our guide Teisha, and her sister Lisa, who run the company, and our driver, Rudy, and Dr. Booker, our teacher, with his wife, Peggy—all of them sweet people leading us through a blessed time in Israel.

But I kept seeing how spiritual all of us are not. It was a tiny glimpse of how Jesus must have felt, consorting with humans, even those who loved him. His patience is a sight to see, smoothing our path and soothing my silly little peevish heart.

So, what was so special about the carnal people pouring in to gather in the desert and watch the moon rise? It is just the fact that this is happening, that God planned it from the beginning, and people are loving Israel. In the new *Friends of Zion* museum that Mike Evans built we met a German woman who comes to Israel about once a year just to say that she loves Jews and Israel, and on Ben Yehuda street a German band was playing and telling passersby they were there as an act of love, just to give Israel their blessing. The band did not seem to be Christians, just people wanting to do the right thing. I read after our return of a group called *Cry for Zion*, who during the Jerusalem Day March demonstrated at the UN headquarters in Jerusalem for Jewish freedom to worship on the Temple Mount. Hecklers, including UN personnel, shouted “Allahu Akbar,” and the demonstrators shouted, “The L-rd, He is God, the L- rd, He is God,” and “Shema Israel!” (<http://cryforzion.com/cry-for-zion-event-press-release/>) This is the first time in history that Christians supported the rights of Jews to pray at the Temple Mount.

That night we sped our bus out of Ein Gedi ahead of the traffic and got nestled in at the Olive Tree hotel in Jerusalem before midnight, and then our guide and driver yanked us out of bed at 330 am to bring us to the Mount of Olives, which is the perfect place on Earth to see the fourth Blood Moon. Where else would you want to be? Friends in Albuquerque had a spectacular view of the moon going dark as it rose over the Sandia Mountains. Much further west, it would have finished before it rose, and too far east of Israel it would have set before it eclipsed. Half the world did not see it at all. We saw it just before dawn, hovering in the western sky over Jerusalem and the Old City, above the Temple Mount and the Dome of the Rock.

Photographically, to be perfect, we could have walked a quarter mile north to get the moon lined up above the Temple Mount, then used a telephoto lens to put them together in the early dawn light. I knew that the light of day would soon bring up the golden color of God's city, even while the red moon hung in the sky above the



dome. So I glimpsed this perfect photo-op of God, but we didn't move to the north, and as the moon dropped lower in the sky and the light rose, it faded into the haze. So I found as usual that the moon is difficult to photograph.

Yet it was a perfect time and place, with a Christian group on the road just above singing praise in an unknown tongue, the gentle murmurs and low talk of the crowd, the "crazy Christians," as Sylvia and I say, blowing the shofar with little respect for time and place, and, at five-fifteen, the Muslim call to prayer,

floating across the morning air. I called my brother in Tulsa, and his moon, rising in the east, was also mine, setting in the west. Picture that: it helps you see yourself and the other, *globally*—in a geophysical sense. The same word used politically is politically correct in all the wrong places. Our phone call moon made me think of "Somewhere Out There," in *An American Tail*:

*and even though I know how very far apart we are
it helps to think we might be wishing on the same bright star
and when the night wind starts to sing a lonesome lullaby
it helps to think we're sleeping underneath the same big sky . . .*



I was not expecting the LORD to plant his feet on the Mount of Olives and split it in two and send clear, rushing water to the Dead Sea and the Mediterranean Sea. But this scene has all the tensions of these expectations, in the singing of hymns and calling out of Muslim prayer, and the boisterous sounds of the shofars. Most of all there is Jerusalem, spread out in the dawn, with the Temple Mount marked by that all-visible Dome. God's plan for the human race, and the human argument back in his face: all there for us on the opening morning of Sukkot.

We were in Jerusalem for the rest of our time, mostly with our group, in and out of the hotel, with a guided tour of the Old City adding detail to what we already knew and loved there . . . this on the day of the first stabbing, at the beginning of what people were thinking might become the third intifada. But we didn't rush away or hide inside. New to me in Jerusalem were the *sukkahs*, a few in the Old City but mostly spread across Jerusalem, perched on high-rise balconies, and at the hotel, where we ate. The best was one that ran the length of a downtown street, made of umbrellas tied high and bright in the sun and blue sky.

The umbrella-*sukkah* was the prettiest idea in Israel, but my third special time and place was a lecture in the hotel by David Nekrutman, of the Center for Jewish-Christian Understanding and Cooperation. See cjcuc.com. This organization appreciates the warming of the Church toward Israel, all these twice-born, half-baked people of the Nations pouring into Israel with clumsy good intentions. He came to speak to our

little Messianic group, and the rules were very clear, agreed upon and sworn to with many warm smiles: no one was trying to convert anyone. This was about how to not be in conflict, and the one carrying this message was

sincere and earnest. The Center was founded by Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin, and David, its Executive Director, is a Jewish-American-Israeli, with degrees in Forensic Psychology and Social Work, once Director of Christian Affairs at the Israeli Consulate in New York.

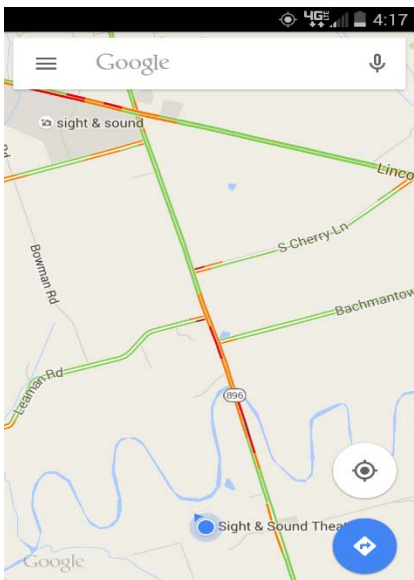
We soon learned that David is also a student at ORU in Tulsa, which you probably know as the linchpin of the buckle of the Bible belt, created by Oral Roberts, of pentecostal and “seed faith” fame. He is getting an MA in Biblical Literature, with a concentration in Judaic-Christian Studies. His MA thesis is about “The Hebraic Roots of the Holy Spirit.” We were amazed, as expected, and smiled at his laughing explanations of how this all comes together.

If Torah is the word of the Spirit, and the Spirit preaches the gospel, and you throw in ORU and, for all I know, speaking in tongues, then we know where we are about to find ourselves, at an unexpected rendezvous, best described as a happy collision at the intersection of two highways that hardly even knew they crossed. Yet David Nekrutman did not go there, for all his cordiality toward Christianity. What came to me was the simple but far reaching fact that the gospel is in the Torah. Standard fare for a Messianic, but real and clear right there in that hotel conference room. I could see this Jew loving his Torah and steering his little ship right toward the safe harbor of Messiah. I don’t mean that if he messes around with those pentecostals in Tulsa he might accidentally get saved; more unified than that: reading Torah takes him *there*, to that “This is it!” place, and for real—no *nothingness* here.

There is, of course, the matter of *the Name*. *HaShem* is everything to the Jew, but *Jesus? Yeshua?* Is that only The Name . . . *as WE know it?*

And there is our Arab Christian friend at the hotel where we stayed one night after the group dropped us off on Saturday. Genuine love exists between us, but with the stabbings in the news, we heard from him the fear of the Arab street about the harsh defenses of Israel. It makes it hard to be sure about what we so easily feel and think.

Just now (Dec. 16), Russ Resnik (Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations) has written in his blog (Divine Reversal) about the Pope’s recent edgy/nuanced statement about the Jews...clearly good news and/or bad news, if we can figure out what to think about it. Russ writes, “It’s worth exploring the idea that a pious, Torah-honoring, God-fearing Jew might benefit from the sacrificial priesthood of Messiah Yeshua without ever professing faith in him.” That’s what I thought I might be glimpsing, when David Nekrutman was speaking.



Since we are all being nice here, we ought to admit the possibility that those engineers were wrong to block out Albuquerque or Human Life behind 5 foot cement block walls, and we are wrong to block out our thoughts *just so*, and be sure we have it mapped correctly. The twisted Pennsylvania roads and the *two* female navigator voices . . . we have to remember these. There are *two* Sight and Sound theaters outside Lancaster, and Google does not know the difference.

We did arrive, and we spread out in the front row to see “Joseph,” in brilliant sound and color, with our sixteen year-old between us, wondering (in my non-existent story) *what on earth to think*.

And if *you think* you just changed planes at 30,000 feet . . . well, that’s the nature of the beast, with these “Weather Reports.” I am fixated on grabbing ideas too far apart and seeing if I can make them happen in the same essay. Sometimes I cheat. So it was 103 and blazing dry, and now we are crunching around on frozen slush and watching the sunshine lick up our six-inch snow.

Happy Chanukkah--ending in two hours. Merry Christmas!