

The Western Wall

We wander down the narrow covered streets
Of gaudy booths, a ragged raucous shawl;
File through the checkpoint where guards search our bags,
Emerge on the broad stair down to the wall.

Vast screen of stone, second foundation sure,
Trees growing from the cracks as well as prayers;
Thick ranks of brown-clad women to the right,
To left, scattered men, books on tables, chairs.

I take a paper cap and pass the fence,
Through suppliant towards the wall I drift:
Some tallith over T-shirt shows at prayer,
In stiff black Hassidim their hands uplift.

They read and sway, hunch still and mutter low,
Or sit and mutely gaze, brushing their knees;
Soft mortar of petitions points the stone,
Silent cacophony of pious pleas.

At the far left, a gate enters a vault;
The wall now lines a library of praise:
Plain shelves, ornate armoires hold holy texts,
God's name, that only time's hand may erase.

Retreating, we ascend, until the wall
Is but the basis of a wider scene;
The gleaming Dome on high, the hidden grave,
Mingle their warring wails in prayer serene.

Reuben Thomas

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