

CITY OF MANY DAYS

By Shulamith Hareven
Translated by Hillel Halkin with the Author
First published in Hebrew by Am Oved, 1972
English translation published by Doubleday, 1977;
Mercury House, 1993
Study guide by Ilana Kurshan

ABOUT THE BOOK:

This novel chronicles the interwoven lives of various Jerusalem residents between 1918 and 1948, during the British Mandate. At the center of the story is Sara Amarillo, the child of Sephardic immigrants who becomes an intrepid, spirited nurse in the local hospital. There she is supervised by Dr. Heinz Barzel, known affectionately as Dr. Bimbi, an immigrant from Frankfurt whose hobbies include botany, playing the violin, and the health of his "Organismus," as he puts it. Also featured in the novel are Subhi Bey and his wife Faiza, a prominent Arab couple with close ties to several Jewish families; their sons, including a nurse named Husni who aspires to be a famous singer; and Alfred von Kluck, a stranded Christian Prussian fiddle maker who eventually marries Sara's younger sister Ofra. At the novel's heart lies Jerusalem, city of many days, whose history passes over its stones like ever-shifting patterns of light.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Shulamith Hareven was born in Warsaw in 1930 and came to pre-State Israel in 1940. She served in the Haganah underground, and was a combat-medic in the 1947-48 siege of Jerusalem. Hareven was one of the founders of the IDF broadcasts and an officer in Command/Operations in the IDF. During the early 1950s, she worked in transit camps with refugees from Arab countries and served as a war correspondent in 1967 and 1973. Hareven, whose novels have been translated into thirteen languages, was the first woman elected as a member of the Hebrew Language Academy. She was also a longtime spokesperson for the Peace Now movement, and during the first Intifada she entered Arab refugee camps and reported to the Israeli press. She served, too, as a columnist on current social, cultural and political events. In 1995, the French magazine, *L'Express*, elected Shulamith Hareven as one of the 100 women "who move the world." She died in 2003.



QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Most of the places that Hareven describes are familiar to residents of Jerusalem today – such as the YMCA ("its tower resembling a tall erection", p. 20), Jaffa Road, Abu Tor. Are any of these or other landmarks/places mentioned in the book familiar to you? How have these places changed since the period of the British Mandate, when this book is set?
2. The Jerusalem residents described in this novel come from many different backgrounds and nationalities. Name a few characters and their place of origin. Do they get along well? Would you call Hareven's Jerusalem a melting pot?
3. Is the relationship between Subhi Bey and the Amarillos typical or atypical of Jewish-Arab relationships in this novel? How does this dynamic change as the book progresses? Compared to the present situation, how well did Jews and Arabs coexist, as per Hareven's depiction?
4. Grandfather Amarillo tells Sara and Ofra about the growth of Jerusalem outside of the city walls (p. 50). Do you know anything about this history? What do you learn from Hareven about this development?
5. Grandfather Amarillo quotes his father, who used to say to God, "If, God forbid, You should ever decide to remove Your presence from this city, please don't let it worry You, because we're staying put, come what may" (p. 52). How would you describe this attitude? How does it compare to your image of the stereotypical halutz (pioneer) or settler today? Is this an attitude that you support, and why?
6. At several points in this novel, the dispute between Jews and Arabs over the land comes to the foreground. List a few such moments. What is each side's claim? What tactics are employed by each nation? To whom are you more sympathetic in each case?
7. Hareven describes Jerusalem as "a city you long for the more you are in it; in which you are most yourself and most miss yourself; in which whatever you find, you will want again from afar" (p. 100). Do any parts of this description resonate for you when you think of Jerusalem? If not, is there another passage in the novel that better evokes your feelings about Jerusalem?
8. Who are the beards, and who are the towels? Who uses these terms, and to what end?



In considering the nomenclature of various Jerusalem neighborhoods, Professor Barzel notes that Jews name for a better future, whereas Arabs name after illustrious leaders of the past (p. 89). What do you think this says about the character of each nation? Would you imagine that this is still true today? Why or why not?

9. What is Matti Zakkai's role in the Hagganah? What does he do in his bunker? Compare this to how Elias Amarillo supports the same cause.

REVIEW QUOTES:

Consider these quotes individually. What does each add to your understanding of Hareven and her work? Do you agree with the claims they make?

“A volatile and aromatic book ... bursting with the sensuous images, pungent smells, street noises and tensions of Jerusalem.”
-- *The New York Times Book Review*

“Brilliant.... Hareven’s poetic narrative is powerful enough to foment an intense desire to make that historic, spiritual, memorable pilgrimage [to Jerusalem].”
-- *Los Angeles Times*

“If Shulamith Hareven were 3,000 years older, I’d suspect her of having written the Song of Songs. As things stand, however, she had to write a new one. Jerusalem, city of chiaroscuro and flame, of crippled olive trees and climbing roses, writes her own poetry; only a few capture the cadences.”
-- *Jerusalem Post*

OTHER BOOKS BY SHULAMITH HAREVEN AVAILABLE IN ENGLISH:

Thirst: The Desert Trilogy (Mercury House, 1996)
The Vocabulary of Peace (Mercury House, 1995)
Twilight and Other Stories (Mercury House, 1991)
Prophet (North Point Press, 1990)
The Miracle Hater (North Point Press, 1988)

