

Jerusalem: Crossroad of the World

An Islamic Perspective¹

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Islam views itself as the youngest member of the Abrahamic family. Allah sent messengers, one after the other, out of His mercy, so that humanity would know Him. He would not have deprived any people on earth from the opportunity to serve Him, nor would He single out any particular people to be above the others in terms of their relationship with Him. He is the Just, and as such all humanity have access to Him. A human being can be elevated in His sight based on the right belief and piety, not because of his/her genome.

Islam came to augment the monotheistic tradition and to safeguard the original revealed message. It is part of the Islamic worldview to believe in the previous revealed books including the Torah [the Book of Moses], the Zabur [the Book of David], the Injil [the Book of Jesus] and the prophets from Adam until Muhammad (Peace be upon them all). Whenever a message suffered from human editing, it was time for a new one to preserve and confirm the word of God. Coming from the same divine source, it is no wonder that Islam embodies many things that are common to the elder sisters, Judaism and Christianity. One of these things is the special relationship that the Holy Land and Jerusalem enjoy. It is important to discuss this relationship in details, for the way forward lies in a deep understanding of each other.

¹ This paper is a modified version of a previous one, "The Holy Land, Jerusalem and Al-Aqsa Mosque in the Islamic Sources". It was published by the *Journal of the Central Conference of American Rabbis* (CCAR) Fall 2000, 60-68

Islam recognizes the fact that the Holy Land is sacred to the People of the Book. When Muslims say that the Holy Land is the “Land of the Prophets”, certainly the prophets of the Children of Israel are included and constitute a continuum in the line of prophecy, which began before them and continued after them. Almost every prophet lived in the Holy Land, or had a special relationship with it, including those who were born elsewhere. An example of the latter is Abraham (Peace be upon him). After he destroyed and mocked the idols of his people, they planned violence against him:

But We delivered him and [his nephew] Lot [and directed them] to the land which We have blessed for the nations. Qur’an, 21: 71

An example of a prophet who had a special relationship with the Holy Land and Jerusalem in particular is that of Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him). The Qur’an stated in the chapter of the Children of Israel, or Al-Isra’, that he was taken in a night journey miraculously from the Sacred Mosque to the Farthest Mosque (Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa):

Glory be to (Allah) Who did take His Servant for a journey by night from the Sacred Mosque [Al-Masjid Al-Haram] to the Farthest Mosque [Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa] whose precincts We did bless, in order that We might show him some of Our Signs: for He is the One who hears and sees [all things]. Qur’an, 17:1

The Hadith, Qur'an commentators, and all of Islamic tradition take this particular verse seriously and considers the Sacred Mosque to be in Mecca and the Farthest Mosque to be in Jerusalem. No Muslim scholar challenged this position throughout the Islamic intellectual history. The parameters of this blessed land go beyond what is between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean. Ibn Kathir, a medieval Muslim scholar, reported the commentary of several early Muslim scholars on verse 21: 71. According to the famous Ubayy Ibn Ka'b, the blessed land is Al-Sham [i.e. Greater Syria, which includes Jerusalem]. The great early commentator, Qatadah, adopted the same position.¹ A more detailed account of the Night Journey and the Ascension [Al-Isra' and Al-Mi'raj] and their relation to Jerusalem will follow.

In addition, there is another verse in the Qur'an with reference to this line of blessing:

Between them and the cities on which We had poured Our blessings,
We had placed cities in prominent positions, and between them We
had appointed stages of journey in due proportion: "Travel therein
secure, by night and by day." Qur'an, 34: 18

According to Mujahid, Al-Hassan, Sa'id Ibn Jubayr, Malik, Qatadah, Al-Dahhak, Al-Sadiyy, Ibn Zayd and many other respected early Muslim scholars, the blessed cities are those of Al-Sham. Ibn 'Abbas, the prominent early scholar of the Qur'an who was also a cousin and companion of the Prophet, maintained that the "blessed cities" is a reference to Bayt Al-Maqdis [i.e. Jerusalem].²

Though there are several references to *the* land, the term “Holy Land” [*Al-Ard Al-Muqaddasah*] is mentioned only once in the Qur’an:

Remember Moses said to his people: “O my People! Call in remembrance the favor of God unto you, when He produced prophets among you, made you kings, and gave you what He had not given to any other among the peoples.

“O my People! Enter the Holy Land which God has assigned unto you, and turn not back ignominiously, for then will you be overthrown, to your own ruin.” Qur’an, 5:20-21

The context is that of Moses (peace be upon him) inviting the Children of Israel to enter the Holy Land after he delivered them miraculously from Egypt across the sea. The Children of Israel refused to enter the Holy Land, because it meant that they had to fight its people, who were known for their exceeding strength. This rejection earned them divine punishment:

God said: “Therefore will the land be out of their reach for forty years: in distraction will they wander through the land: but sorrow you not over these rebellious people.” Qur’an, 5: 26

This verse is read in two very different ways, each one arriving at a very different meaning. The first way as shown above divides the verse into two parts, the first of which ends after “years”. This way of dividing the verse indicates that the Children of Israel were forbidden to enter the Land temporarily because of their disobedience.

The second also divides the verse into two parts, the first of which ends after “reach”. Some scholars interpreted this way of dividing the verse to mean that the Children of Israel were forbidden to enter the Land in an absolute sense, again as a result of their disobedience. I am personally inclined toward the first reading, which considers the prohibition temporarily, and the entry to the Holy Land conditional.

Sayyed Qutub stated in *In the Shade of the Qur’an*, a contemporary Qur’anic exegeses, that the reason for this prohibition is to allow room for a new generation of Israelites to be brought up.³ I would add that the new generation was ready to submit to the will of God, and therefore qualified for the entry to the Holy Land as “submitters”; those who submit their personal wills entirely to the will of God. The meaning of “Muslims” is also submitters. The Qur’an states in clear terms that righteousness is a prerequisite for inheriting lands:

Before this We wrote in the Psalms, after the Message [given to Moses]: “My servants, the righteous, shall inherit the earth”.

Qur’an, 21: 105

Other verses in the Qur’an directly associate the religious state of the Children of Israel to the inheritance of the land:

And We made a people, considered weak [in Egypt], inheritors of the East and West of the land [i.e. all of it], whereon We sent down Our blessings. The fair promise of your Lord was fulfilled for the Children of Israel, because they had patience and constancy, and We leveled to

the ground the great works and fine buildings which Pharaoh and his people erected. Qur'an, 7: 137

According to these verses, right relationship with God, which means submission to His will, is the absolute criterion for inheritance of the Land. Of critical importance to the Qur'an is the fact that genetic or biological descent is never sufficient in itself to merit such inheritance. It is a non-factor in this respect.

Jerusalem, or Bayt Al-Maqdis [House of the Holy] is, by definition, a holy place. It is included in verse 17:1, either by referring to the Al-Aqsa Mosque or to its precincts about which God said: "We did bless". The great 14th century Muslim scholar, Ibn Kathir, said that Al-Aqsa Mosque is Bayt Al-Maqdis.⁴ Indeed, the "Al-Aqsa Mosque" and "Bayt Al-Maqdis" are used interchangeably whereby one of them is used as a metaphor of the other, as in the following hadith:

Maimuna said: "O Messenger of Allah! Inform us about Bayt Al-Maqdis!" He said: "It is the land where people will be gathered and resurrected [on the Day of Judgement]. Go (grammatically imperative!) and pray in it, for a prayer in it is the equivalent of a thousand prayer in other [mosques]." I said: "What if I couldn't reach it?" He said: "Then you send a gift of oil to it in order to be lit in its lanterns, for the one who does so is the same like the one who has been there."⁵

The hadith shows that it is the religious duty of Muslims all over the world to maintain Al-Aqsa Mosque both physically and spiritually. The relationship with Al-Aqsa Mosque is primarily fulfilled through acts of worship, but the physical maintenance of the Mosque is also part of the responsibility of all Muslims. The fulfillment of both duties will be impaired as long as Al-Aqsa Mosque remains under occupation! The truth of the matter is that under Israeli occupation, Muslims do not have free access to the Mosque. Those Muslims who are prevented from praying there and from supporting it are denied the ability to fulfill critical religious responsibilities. Since the miraculous Night Journey of Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him), *al-Isra' wa al-Mi'raj*, took place more than fourteen centuries ago, Muslims have established a sublime and perpetual relationship with Al-Aqsa Mosque. The Prophet was taken from Al-Masjid Al-Haram in Mecca to Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa in Jerusalem. This event marked a twining relation between the two mosques. The Qur'an reminds Muslims and non-Muslims of this important event at the beginning of Surah Al-Isra' (17:1) which was mentioned earlier.

When the Prophet (Peace be upon him) reported the event to the people of Mecca, they challenged him to prove it by describing Jerusalem to them, because they were familiar with it through their caravan trading. They used this story to undermine his credibility as a prophet, for they knew that the journey from Mecca to Jerusalem would take several weeks during that time in each direction. They were considering Muhammad's abilities, not that of the Omnipotent God!

The greatest Hadith scholars, Al-Bukhari and Muslim, narrated that the Prophet (Peace be upon him) said:

“When [the Meccan tribe of] Quraish did not believe me [about the Night Journey], I stood in the Hijr⁶ and God revealed to me Bayt Al-Maqdis [i.e. Jerusalem] and I began describing its signs to them while I was looking at it.”

This hadith provides the setting for interpreting verse 17:1, and explains why Muslims believe that the “Farthest Mosque” is in Jerusalem.

The twinning relationship manifests itself in the fact that another term “the Sanctuary” or Al-Haram also refers to Al-Aqsa Mosque, deriving from the name “the Noble Sanctuary” or Al-Masjid Al-Haram in Mecca. This reflects the very close relationship between the two mosques in Islamic consciousness. It should be noted that the Qur’anic reference to the Al-Aqsa Mosque, as a mosque, took place years before the actual arrival of Muslims to Jerusalem. It means that part of what the Muslim believes is that Al-Aqsa Mosque was designated as a mosque by God. Other than the three Mosques of Mecca, Medina and Jerusalem, Muslims are free to choose the site for a new mosque, but once it is established, it remains a mosque forever.

The journey by night had Jerusalem as a transit station or as a gate to the heavens. God could have taken His Prophet (Peace be upon him) directly from Mecca to heaven, but He didn’t. Al-Aqsa Mosque has a very prominent place in the whole event. It was the place where the Prophet (Peace be upon him) led the other prophets and messengers in prayer. This act is interpreted, among other things, as inheriting the responsibility for maintaining the mosque.

Bayt Al-Maqdis became the first Qiblah or direction of prayer. Al-Bara' said: "We have prayed with the Messenger of Allah (Peace be upon him) in the direction of Bayt Al-Maqdis for sixteen or seventeen months. Then we were directed to the Ka'bah [in Mecca]".⁷ Despite the change of the Qiblah, the mere fact that Muslims prayed in the direction of Jerusalem is an indication of its prominence. According to the Islamic worldview, however, the mosque in Mecca was the first ever established by God for humankind, so it should not be surprising that the Qiblah was shifted back to it.

The first House [of worship] appointed for men, was that at Bakkah [Mecca]: full of blessing and of guidance for all the worlds.
Qur'an, 3: 96

The same position is confirmed in a hadith narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim:

Abu Dhar Al-Ghafari -May God be pleased with him- said: "I said: O Messenger of Allah: Which mosque was established first on earth? He said: Al-Masjid Al-Haram [in Mecca]. I said: Then which one? He said: Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa [in Jerusalem]. I said: How much time was between them?" He said: Forty years, and when it is time for prayer, wherever you are, pray, for that where the merit is."

The Qur'an teaches that, while a single system of ethics and belief should be common to the revelations and Scriptures of all peoples, the specific laws of ritual and behavior [i.e. Shari'ah] may vary among peoples and religions.

“...To each among you have We prescribed a Law and an Open Way.
If Allah had so willed, He would have made you a single People, but
(His plan is to test you in what He has given you: so strive as in a race
in all virtues.” Qur’an, 5: 48

It should not be surprising, therefore, that Jews pray toward Jerusalem while Muslims pray toward Mecca. This fact does not reduce the sanctity of Jerusalem for Muslims. The second chapter of the Qur’an (verses 142-150) addresses the change of the Qiblah in detail. The basic message is that both directions of prayer are from God and that “the people of the Book know that that is Truth from their Lord”.

Moreover, the importance of Al-Aqsa Mosque in the life of Muslims is reflected in the many other traditions of the Prophet. One of these traditions –narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim- makes it clear that travelling in order to visit mosques for religious purposes, is permitted to three mosques only: Al-Masjid Al-Haram (in Mecca), Al-Masjid Al-Nabawi (in Medina) and Al-Masjid Al-Aqsa (in Jerusalem). It is for this reason that prior to the 1967 war, which led to the occupation of the remainder of Palestine (i.e. the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip), many Muslims used to perform Hajj to Mecca and visit Medina, and then visit the third most holy site in Islam, Al-Aqsa Mosque. Many would settle in Jerusalem because of its sanctity. There are many neighborhoods and lodges that still carry the names of the countries from which these pilgrims came. Examples include the Moroccan neighborhood (confiscated after the 1967 war and annexed to the Jewish “Quarter” in the old city), the Afghani Zawieh (now a sufi lodge headed by a Sheikh

who is a descendant of an Afghani family), and the Indian Zawieh (a lodge for the Indian visitors but used for different purposes now). In fact, many family names in Jerusalem reflect a rainbow of backgrounds from Europe, Asia and Africa. Muslims began to relocate into this part of the world during the time of the second Caliph `Umar Ibn Al-Khattab. `Umar himself, as a Caliph, never left Medina to any city that the Muslims conquered except for Jerusalem which shows his deep appreciation and recognition that the city has for Muslims.

It should be noted that the division of the Old City into Jewish, Christian and Muslim quarters or neighborhoods is misleading. According to *Perspectives*, which is published by the Middle East Council of Churches (Issue #8, July, 1990, p. 70) Christian property is 420 dunams, Muslim property 405 dunams and Jewish property 62 dunams (1 dunam= 1,000 square meters). In addition, the number of Jewish settlers in the Old City hardly reaches 10% compared to the Arab population. The most important thing is that Muslim and Christian families and property are scattered in the Old City. There are churches and Christian families in the so-called Muslim quarter and there are mosques and Muslim families in the so-called Christian quarter. In fact there are Mosques and Muslim families (those who are still determined not give in to pressure) in the “Jewish quarter”. Jerusalem is an Arab city open to all those who would like to reside in it. This openness can be achieved only in a post-occupation context, with an authority that does not discriminate against the citizens of the city.

I am proud that after fourteen centuries of Islamic rule, the Christian property in the Old City is more than that of the Muslims. I am proud that these centuries did not pose a threat to the Christian presence in the Old City and in Palestine in general. Christians are part and parcel of the Arab social fabric. Unfortunately, the Israeli

occupation with its apartheid policies made life unbearable and led many Palestinians to flee the country. While Muslims too leave Palestine, the impact was greater amongst the Palestinian Christians. This poses an existential threat to Christian presence. Israel keeps blaming the Palestinian Authority for the dwindling numbers of Christians. Some times they “leak” reports about this issue as if it is classified information. One of these “leaks” came from the office of former Prime-minister Benjamin Netanyahu. What for sure leaked was cheap tactics. Professor Bernard Sabella, a Catholic Palestinian sociologist proved beyond doubt that Christian immigration resulted directly from the Israeli occupation.

The Israeli occupation led also to the prevention of Muslims to come from other parts of the world to visit Jerusalem and other places in Palestine. I have memories of better days. Being a Jerusalemite myself and living only a short walking distance from the Al-Aqsa Mosque, I have witnessed the influx of Muslim pilgrims from many parts of the world immediately after the Hajj season prior to 1967. Unfortunately, the Israeli occupation sealed off Palestine from the rest of the Muslim world. After more than three decades Al-Aqsa Mosque is still being deprived from having the great and wonderful flow of Muslims who visit Al-Masjid Al-Haram in Mecca and Al-Masjid Al-Nabawi in Al-Medina.

Al-Aqsa Mosque was developed and the buildings expanded on a large scale during the reign of the two seventh century Umayyad Caliphs, Abd Al-Malik Ibn Marwan and his son, Al-Walid even to the extent that it surpassed the architectural grandeur of all mosques. The magnificence of the architecture of the Dome of the Rock and the southern most building of the Al-Aqsa Mosque is witness to the importance of these holy sites in Islam.

Some critics of Islam have claimed that because Jerusalem was never a political center of the Islamic world, it could not have been held in high esteem by Islam. This is a false argument, for even Mecca, the most sacred religious site of the Islamic world, was never the capital of any Islamic state. This certainly does not negate the importance of sacred religious sites. One should remember that the Umayyads developed the site of Al-Aqsa Mosque before the end of the first century A.H. They moved their capital from Medina to Damascus. Thereafter, no Muslim ruler took any of the three sacred cities, Mecca, Medina or Jerusalem as a capital. It is rather the importance of these cities that led them to their decisions, not the opposite.

There are many other traditions extolling the special merits of Jerusalem, including the view that praying at Al-Aqsa Mosque is far more efficacious than prayers in other locations (with the exception of the two mosques of Mecca and Medina), or initiating the minor Hajj [the *Umrah*] at Al-Aqsa Mosque is equivalent to performing Hajj. Numerous traditions celebrate and glorify Al-Aqsa, Jerusalem, and the entire Holy Land, so many that most cannot be produced here.

I would like to refer to `Umar Ibn Al-Khattab once more. After entering the city, the Bishop of Jerusalem invited him to pray inside the Holy Sepulcher church. `Umar declined politely and stepped outside the church to pray. This act set the pace for interfaith relationship within the city of Jerusalem. One should have very respectful relationship with members of the other two faiths; it should be reflected in deep respect for the privacy of their places of worship.

Following the ethos of `Umar's covenant, I believe that Jews, Christians and Muslims should have the freedom of worship in their own places as it used to be the case before 1948. Yet, freedom of exercising one's religion cannot be reduced to Jerusalem only. An example of this is the tens of mosques that Israel systematically refuses to allow Muslims to have access to them since 1948. I find it absurd that Israel declares some of the mosques as military zones in order to prevent Muslims from worshipping in them. Other mosques are turned into taverns, restaurants, offices, museums and barns. The upper floor of the Siksik mosque in Jaffa is used as a Café, and Keter, an Israeli plastic company, occupies the first floor. Such a policy means that real peace is not around the corner.

The Islamic worldview recognizes the organic relation to Judaism and Christianity that entails existential pluralism. Such pluralism, however, is not extended to sovereignty. Compared to the way the Crusaders and the Zionists treated the local population, I have the moral obligation to subscribe to Islamic rule as the best option. Despite the distortions and the misconceptions that are circulated with ill intentions, I do not shy away from a system that recognizes the humanity of the other. The Palestinians have been dehumanized throughout the years of the occupation. They have been systematically subjected to various forms of ethnic cleansing. This includes committing massacres, physical uprooting from their homes, demolishing their houses, destroying cultivated land, confiscation of land, restriction of building permits and revoking the residency rights of East Jerusalemites. I believe that our region and the world at large would continue to be deprived of a major and viable civilizational force, if Islam continues to be discredited.

Before 1948, and precisely before the advent of Zionism, the social fabric had Jews, Christians and Muslims. Jews could have fulfilled their religious duties without forcing a nation-state on the map of Palestine. The idea of the nation-states is an invention of the European enlightenment. Nation-states are a sure recipe for war. Europe deconstructed, through its newly established union, the notion of the nation-state, which is not viable at all in our world. Therefore, while I cherish any breakaway from Israeli occupation, I think that the two-states solution is temporary.

The history of the Holy Land witnessed different sovereigns. Their list includes, but not restricted to, the Canaanites, Philistines, Jebusites, Chaldeans, Persians, Greeks, Romans (including Byzantinian Christian), Israelites and Muslims. The earliest settlements in Jerusalem date back to ca. 4000 BC. The Israelites, compared to the documented history of Jerusalem, ruled for a very short period. Even when compared to the Islamic rule, which extended from 638 CE to the turn of the twentieth century except when it was interrupted during the Crusades, the history of the Israelites is dwarfed. Imagine what will happen if every people who ruled Palestine claim the right to establish a state somewhere within its borders!

If we look at the religion of the sovereigns, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, we find that all three lost and regained sovereignty over the Holy Land. This proves beyond any doubt that God did not give any particular people the upper hand in the absolute since. It is my deep conviction that justice was and still is the criterion for any continued sovereignty. I read in Jewish scripture that “the land will vomit the unjust”! And in the words of the medieval Muslim scholar Ibn Taimiyyah: “ God renders the just state victorious, even if it is non-Muslim.”

There is a dire need for Jews, Christians and Muslims to check the culture that develops around a sacred text. Often, clergy as well as ordinary people, add to or reduce a message to suit their ideologies. When I read the story of Moses (Peace be upon him) I realized that they were not granted anything qua cultural Jews. This is clear from the fact that they were punished to dwell in the Sinai Peninsula when they sinned against God. They where and still are required to verify the revealed message and to live up to its ideals. There should be no differences between scripture and the way of the people as we witness in the discrepancies between Biblical and Rabbinical Judaism. One should always remember that the Israelites were liberated from Egypt to live in the Holy Land and to submit themselves to the will of God. Or rather, they had to submit themselves to God in order to qualify for living in the Holy Land. Don't they believe in becoming a light for the nations [*or le-goyim*]? Ironically, the strongest light coming from them, at this stage in history (It is March, 2002 now), is the light associated with shelling the Palestinians!

The context in which Jerusalem exists today is very complex. Two “nations” and three religions contest it one way or the other. Each side read the reality differently. For the Jews, Jerusalem is “liberated”! For the Arabs, it is under occupation. United Nations resolutions and international law are on the side of the occupied, the Palestinians. The United States of America is on the side of Israel; it used the veto “right” tens of times over the years to prevent justice from being administered to the victims of Israeli aggression. Israel is the only country in the world that functions with disregard to United Nation resolutions, International law and the Fourth Geneva Convention, especially regarding Palestinian rights. These rights include the inalienable right of return.

According to the predominant Israeli position, Jerusalem is the “eternal” and “united capital” of the Jewish State. Albeit being uttered by many Jews, the “eternal” component of this statement is incompatible with Judaism. Every descent theologian knows very well that there are no eternal capitals on earth. Jerusalem was sacked some 27 times in its history. The Palestinian response to the “Israeli” propaganda is of the same nature. It also claims that Jerusalem is the everlasting capital of the Palestinian State from eternity to eternity.

The Israeli position regarding Jerusalem is exclusive and it ignores the history of the city that began way before Judaism showed up on world stage. It overlooks the fact that the indigenous Arab population outdates the Hebrews. If the Jewish historical claims are based upon dwelling in the Holy Land, both Christians and Muslims have a lot of it. If it is theological relationship with the Holy Land, Christians and Muslims have it as well. If the issue is loving Jerusalem, no one has the right to claim that the other is less attached to it, be he/she Jewish, Christian or Muslim. If you could only see the Muslims going up Lions’ Gate at dawn, entering the Old City on their way to the Al-Aqsa Mosque to pray the Dawn prayer. If you could only see, at the same time, the Christian priests and nuns leaving through the same gate, blending with the fading darkness of the night with their robes, walking to the Church of the Gethsemane, at the foot of Mount of Olives. Only a real lover would show his/her love and commitment that early in the morning.

Personally, Jerusalem never fails to mesmerize me with her spiritual beauty. I would talk more about the intimate relationship with this beloved city, but lovers do not reveal too much. May be one day she will allow me!

Yet, I have to confess that, using legal terms, those Muslims who pray at Al-Aqsa Mosque are Blue Identity card holders and the priests and the nuns are

“foreigners”. The Muslims who are Jerusalemites do have access to the Holy City, as well as the Jerusalemite Christians. But Muslims and Christians from the Gaza Strip and the West Bank (i.e. according to “Israeli” definition which excludes East Jerusalem) do not have access to Jerusalem and, therefore, they do not have access to their Holy Places. Even Jerusalemite Muslims do not have access to the Al-Aqsa Mosque all the time. Many times they are prevented as part of the many forms of collective punishment that are inflicted on the Palestinian People. You have to be male and young in order for you to be denied the basic right of freedom of worship. I happen to be “young”, for I have attempted to pray many Friday prayers last year and I was denied entry to the mosque because I was younger than 45 years of age! I am 43 and I need another two years in order to qualify to pray according to “Israeli” standards. I had to join a large crowd of “youngsters” like myself and we prayed at the bottom of the street that leads to Lions’ Gate. There was another congregation praying outside Damascus Gate. Whenever we prostrated, our heads were very close to the military boots of the “Israeli” occupation soldiers. Do I blame my mother who did not give birth to me two years earlier? That would obviously shift the blame. I should rather blame the ideology that gave birth to the occupation and its apartheid practices. It is Zionism that spoiled everything for us including the social fabric that existed before its advent. I believe that all Jews, Christians and Muslims are spiritual citizens of Jerusalem. Yet, everyone knows that the Holy Land is a small strip of land sandwiched between the Mediterranean and the Jordan River, realizes that there is simply no room for all to reside here.

I would like to invite members of the three faiths to or rather caution them against an idolatrous relationship with the land, where possessing the land exclusively at any price contradicts the very notion of monotheism.

If I have to come up with a name of the state that would reflect Jerusalem and the Holy Land as a crossroad for humanity, though I am very comfortable with “Palestine”, I would never think of the name Ishmael because of the connotations of exclusiveness. Israel (Jacob) or Isaac would be as exclusive. I guess I do not need to say that the name we are looking for is Abraham (Peace be upon them all and upon the Holy Land).

¹ Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir* (Beirut: Dar Al-Jeel, 1988) vol. 3, p. 180.

² Ibn Kathir, vol. 3, p. 512.

³ Sayyed Qutub, *Fi Zilaal Al-Qur'an*, 12th edition (Beirut: Dar Al-Shuruq, 1986) vol. 2, p. 871.

⁴ Ibn Kathir, vol. 3, p. 3.

⁵ Abu Dawud, *Sunan* # 457; Ibn Majah, *Sunan* # 147; Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad* # 6/463; Al-Bayhaqi, *Sunan* #2/441

⁶ Hijr Isma'il, an area considered to be part of the Ka'bah but ended up outside it when it was rebuilt before Muhammad (Peace be upon him) became a prophet.

⁷ Al-Bukhari, *Sahih* # 40, 399, 4486, 4492, 7252; Muslim, *Sahih* # 525, 527