

Session 5

THE GROWTH OF RELIGIOUS NATIONALISM AND THE CONFLICT OVER THE HOLY PLACES

Chair: Jeff Helsing

Discussion of a paper by Yitzhak Reiter (Ashkelon Academic College and the Truman Institute of the Hebrew University). The paper is in the printed volume of *Shared Narratives*.

JEFF HELSING: This is now the session on the growth of religious nationalism and the conflict over the Temple Mount and al-Aqsa.

YITZHAK REITER: I see some common elements between the previous session and this one, namely the role of religion and the term "historical rights" as well as the land, the right to the land. That is, the connection between religion and the land.

In the case of both Israelis and Palestinians we speak about religious nationalism. Religion, by definition - and I hope no one here will be offended by what I say - demands the totality of the belief of the believers. It also excludes the "other", and delegitimizes the other by exploiting religious traditions and convictions. Of course, there have been different attitudes throughout history toward different religions, but in the text, the holy text, we find a lot of examples of how one religious denomination delegitimizes the other and our task is to examine the current narratives, which are related to the issues of land and holy sites in this Holy Land. I should note that I am primarily referring to the three great monotheistic religions.

Some other preliminary remarks. When we speak about the Haram al-Sharif, or the Temple Mount, or the Sacred Compound, we have three concentric circles, one encompassed by the other, in which the central one is the Temple Mount, or the Sacred Compound, the middle one is Jerusalem, and the outer one is Eretz Israel for the Jews, or Palestine for the Muslims and Arabs.

The inner circle, which is the central holy site, is being employed in order to serve those who are struggling for rights in the outer circle, which is the entire land of Palestine. In the context of narratives of the Temple Mount, what we find is that the site is being used by politicians and by clerics as well, to serve their political claims.

I came to this topic by studying the Islamic narrative, not the Jewish narrative. I am very happy that I was invited to this project because I had the opportunity to add the Jewish narrative and compare between them and juxtapose the two narratives and try

to analyze both of them and to see the differences and the similarities, and to realize that, even being totally different, they are perhaps a mirror of each other.

Now, we have discussed the role of religion before, but I have to add, or perhaps emphasize the fact that to the Arab or Islamic side, Islam is more important and more salient in the discourse than Judaism is within the Israeli narrative. In the Israeli narrative, of course religion is important, but Jerusalem and the holy site, as a symbol, became more important only after the failure of the second Camp David summit, when it became clear to Israelis that Yasser Arafat denied the Jewish attachment or Jewish affiliation to the Temple.

Before this I think that for many secular Jews in Israel, Jerusalem -- I mean the eastern part of Jerusalem as well as the second "circle" Jerusalem -- were less important. So we have an asymmetry here regarding the role of religion within the society. That is my contention, that Arab Muslim society is more influenced by Islamist discourse than Israeli society is by Jewish discourse, and therefore I think the narratives of Jerusalem and the holy sites are influenced by this fact.

Now I would like to make another remark about the sources used to study the narratives. Most of what I studied was academic. I mean history books, semi-academic books, textbooks or websites which reveal different narratives of Jewish or Islamic manifestations. However, these studies are basing themselves on references, and the main references are of course the Bible, the Quran and *hadith* and other holy scriptures and religious traditions which serve to express or "to construct" the narrative.

It is essential to emphasize that we don't only have two narratives, but rather that we have a variety of narratives on each of the two sides.

However, having said this, we can find in each of the different set of narratives, what I call a meta-narrative, something that is common, particularly in the messages that the narrative was constructed for. I relate to the role of history in consolidating national identity in the way that Anthony Smith used to speak about it, that in order for people to claim nationalism, they have to have a core of "ethnie", a cultural, religious, or perhaps linguistic core of perceptions on which the nation bases itself as it constructs its narrative.

In this regard, the narratives, as I see them, are being constructed to send a message. To reveal a political message, to rally the people around an idea. And in the case of Jerusalem and the holy sites, it is also to argue, to debate and challenge the narrative of the other, or the contentions, and historical and political arguments of the other.

In both narratives you can see some sort of denial of the attachment of the other to the holy sites. In my studies of the Islamic narrative, I found volumes in many sources, something which I can see as a common belief in many parts of the Islamic world, of the denial of the very existence of the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem.

Whenever the word *heikal* (Temple) is being written in a text in Arabic, it always has the attachment of *al-maza'um*, the alleged: "The alleged temple." And in many contexts, the alleged temple, if it's *al-maza'um*, perhaps it didn't exist at all, or at least it didn't exist in Jerusalem, as Yasser Arafat said at different times. Once he said it was in Nablus, and another time he used something alongside the theory of Dr. Kamal Salibi in his book, *The Bible Came from Arabia*, according to which it was in Yemen.

This is an example of a case in which the ideas of one historian are picked up by politicians, disrupted and then employed and interjected into the general discourse, and disseminated and perhaps internalized in wider audiences of a nation.

And on the Jewish side, you also have the process of denigration of the importance of Jerusalem to the Muslim world. All the writings of Israeli orientalists base themselves on Ibn Tamiyyah, the 14th century Hanafi jurist who referred to the Haram in al-Quds, i.e., Jerusalem, as *Qiblah Mansukha* – the abrogated direction of prayer. In other words, the Jerusalem mosque should not be regarded as a sacred shrine in the status of the *Haram*. Israeli orientalists are using the views of this Hanbali scholar so as to claim that in the eyes of Muslims, Jerusalem has lost importance. They also claim that the Prophet's decision to change the direction for prayer from Jerusalem to Mecca indicates that Jerusalem is not a holy city or at least that it has a lower status of holiness for all Muslims. Thus, they say, even if it is holy or important to Muslims, it is only the third city or the third most sacred area after Mecca and Medina; and that it is not mentioned in the Quran, whereas Jerusalem is mentioned 650 or so times in the Bible. This reflects the fact that Israeli Jews and Jews in general are ignorant of the importance of Jerusalem to Muslims since the 7th century, and particularly from the Umayyad period onwards.

It was very clear after the Camp David II summit that Israelis and Palestinians found that they know little about the importance of Har Ha'Bayit or al-Haram al-Sharif to the other party. For example, as discussed in Shlomo Ben Ami's book, *Scars of War, Wounds of Peace*, he and many other Israelis were sure that the Palestinians would somehow agree to some kind of a symbolic sovereignty of the Jews over al-Haram al-Sharif. Likewise, many Palestinians didn't realize until after Camp David how important Jerusalem is to Israeli Jews. Public opinion polls show that since 2000 many Israelis, more than before July 2000, are reluctant to renounce control over Jerusalem, or the older part of Jerusalem, including the Temple Mount, or to agree that the Palestinians will have a share in, or will be involved in the administration or control over the Temple Mount today.

Yusuf is dealing particularly with the post-1967 narrative, and I will deal with the pre-1967 narrative, and the two periods differ.

What I found was that many elements of the Jewish and Muslim narratives of the Temple Mount, or al-Haram al-Sharif, refer to the issue of historical right or were even constructed so as to strengthen each party's claim of historical right. One of them is the question of who was the first on this site in the city.

Whereas Jewish claims are for 3,000 years – the 3,000th anniversary of the City of David was celebrated in the 1990s - the Muslims claim 5,000 years for the Arab *Yabus* (Jebus). They point out that Jerusalem was settled before the Hebrews arrived in the area by the Canaanites, the Jebusites, and others, who were Arab tribes who roamed this area, or emigrated here from the Arab peninsula.

The second element is the issue of who was present in this region. For most purposes, when you speak about Jerusalem, you are speaking about Palestine as well. The questions of who was present, in which periods, and was there a continuity of the presence of the Jews or the Arabs or Muslims in the city, all bear on the issue of historical right. If you were the first here, or you were present here for a longer period,

you claim a historical right to the place. And here you find different arguments.

The Jews, of course, claim that they were present in the area not only since King David, but before. Since Abraham met Melchizedek they say they were continuously present in Jerusalem and since the mid-19th century they have again been in the majority.

After the destruction of the Temple, although they were exiled, some Jews remained in the city until the Byzantine period. After the Islamic conquest of Palestine, they returned to Jerusalem. The Caliph Umar ibn al-Khattab, according to tradition, around the year 635 resettled seventy Jewish families from Tiberias in Jerusalem, and since then there has been a Jewish presence in the city. The Muslims claim that even if there was a presence of Jews in Jerusalem, it lasted not more than seventy years, during the kingdoms of David and Solomon.

Some of them, like the Sheikh Dr Yusuf al-Qaradawi, accept that it might have lasted about 350 years, but that this was the extent of the Jewish presence in Jerusalem.

The third element in the debate over historical rights is the religious and political importance of the city to your own creed, and to the other.

Of course, the Jewish narrative stresses the liturgy, the prayers that we have that mention Jerusalem, and I'm sure most of you, even the Palestinians, are aware of the "next year in Jerusalem" prayer from the Israeli religious texts and rituals and traditions, as a manifestation of the religious importance, as well as the political importance to reconstitute the Jewish nation by returning to Zion, returning to Jerusalem, and even establishing the Third Temple, according to some Jews.

The Muslims, of course, emphasize the continuous Islamic control of Jerusalem since the Islamic conquest, except for the 100 years of Crusader control. They also point out that the Ayubid, Mameluke, and Ottoman sultans, as well as other dynasties, established institutions, madrasas, mosques and other monuments in Jerusalem as an expression of the importance of the city to Islam, and its centrality to Islamic and Arab awareness.

JEFF HELSING: Mr. Natsheh

YUSUF NATSHEH: God help me.

By the way, when the Crusaders swept into the city of Jerusalem, they shouted, "God helps us." And as you know, later that day they committed a great massacre.

That is even according to their records.

However, what I would like to start with are just a few technical points, and then I will touch on a few other things. The technical points concern the subject for my topic. It seems to me that we don't just have different narratives, but we have different approaches. And that's really quite all right.

Yitzhak was kind enough to send me his outline, and my first reaction to it was, it's too wide, and a ten minute presentation is not going to cover it.

So I chose to concentrate on our daily issues, since I am an eyewitness, as the archaeologist of the Waqf on the Haram al-Sharif, and whether I am neutral or biased, this is something else. So I chose a few subjects which impact our understanding and our side today. And I must emphasize that I am here today representing myself. It reminds me that in the early 1980s, when I was just starting my work at the Waqf

administration, and at the same time I was a lecturer at Bir-Zeit University on a part-time basis. At the Waqf they used to call me “the Communist”, and when I went to Bir-Zeit, they would say this is a religious man. So I don't know still if I am a Communist or a religious man, but I am trying to be as academic as I can be, as Yitzhak tried.

I feel, as it is generally recognized, that communities, whether they are ascending or declining, refer to their past for different reasons. For instance, at every Friday prayer I have attended, usually the Sheikh speaks about the beautiful past of Islam. I see this also from the Jewish side, as I am somewhat educated in Israeli thinking; I attend courses at Hebrew University and am a licensed tour guide from the Israeli Ministry of Tourism. So I am a little bit aware of what goes on in that society.

When Israelis touch Palestinian religious or political history, they are diminishing the Palestinian narrative. They are just emphasizing what we consider is not the core of the problem. For instance, take the Dome of the Rock. I am proud of it as the oldest standing Islamic monument in the world. It's beautiful. However, Israeli scholars sometimes, for political reasons, claim there was no Islamic contribution in it. The architecture is of Byzantine origin, or it is western or it is Israeli.

I never hear from them a real attempt to understand Islam or architecture or something as it is represented in Muslim culture. As scholars we don't have to refrain from criticism, or be methodological critiques. But we do have to mention what the Muslims are saying, or trying to express, and then indicate our own ideas on this.

I have written about the holy land, not just about Jerusalem, but went directly to al-Haram al-Sharif. It is becoming more common to use the term “Temple Mount”. And using the Temple Mount, for me as a Palestinian, is really very difficult to digest. If the narrative is dealing with the First Temple or Herod's time, perhaps this would be acceptable. But when you speak about the Dome of the Rock, Jebel al-Aqsa, it is like calling Danny Mohammed. You can't just take a name from a different past and slap it on. This is so important and so sensitive. Even in the latest decision by UNESCO regarding academic networking, about the conservation of Jerusalem, for the first time it mentioned al-Haram al-Sharif/the Temple Mount.

Every day when I come to work at the Haram, I park at St. Stephen's Gate and I have to open my bag for the Israeli policeman, though I have been coming this way since 1977. I have never told him I am a Waqf employee, because if I tell him that he will have a reaction, and as happens in other situations, it would mean more harassment.

Now, I would like to take you to recent events which will constitute our future history, especially in this area. And as a person who supervised the restoration of projects inside and outside the Haram, from 1967 until 2000, relatively we enjoyed what we called independence, and that was the status quo that we were used to. I used to restore, to maintain many buildings, Mameluke, Ottoman, and others. I never applied to the Israeli Antiquities Authority although monthly, or at least seasonally, we had coffee together. We never applied to the municipality to maintain our heritage. These were Islamic institutions, mosques, and other such buildings.

Since 2000, after the Sharon visit, it is a completely different situation. The Israeli authorities are now trying to take over the Haram. For example, after what we called the Rehabilitation, that raised a lot of questions about whether we were really

destroying or eradicating the Jewish remains there. But they are trying to interfere.

Right now we have a good technical team. Later, they started to really judge that team, whether it's technical or not. And they started the whole story of manipulation, and they started to try to achieve political goals using religious sites. From both sides, I agree. But sometimes the Israelis are clearer, and we had the bulge in the western wall, the bulge that Mazar compared to a pregnant woman. That pregnant woman is going to give birth in a matter of two months or something. Really was this an academic approach among intellectuals, or cheap propaganda?

When we have technical difficulties we have meetings with the Israelis and discuss them. We have differences, of course, on estimates of the dangers involved. We suggest, "Let's have a neutral party look at it". And the Israelis are maneuvering, refusing, delaying, and we say, "Let's have UNESCO". This is my version, and you can ask John Seligman, the Jerusalem District Archaeologist, what is his version.

And after delay and delay and delay, they accepted a Jordanian to be the third party. I am a Jordanian employee. I take my salary every month from the Jordanian government.

I accept what Yitzhak Reiter has written in his paper, apart from one thing that I would like to call to your attention. Muslims believe that it is not Mohammed who ordered the Qibla to be shifted from Jerusalem. Rather, it was Allah, according to what Muslims believe.

I try to ask, what is the position of Jerusalem in the Jewish religion? I try my best to rely on Israeli sources, on Jewish sources. The Israelis have the means, the resources; they are always the stronger party. The weak will always feel they are surrounded. They would like to defend themselves. So are we going to witness an educational and cultural dispute which will be more agreeable than a political one? Maybe we will seek or we will succeed, to have a compromise in a political situation. But what about culture, what about education? I think this is a more difficult issue than the political. The political is not easy, but this is how I work between the two societies.

DANNY RUBINSTEIN: I have two remarks, the first about the names. I fully agree with Yusuf, when you speak in your language you should use the language that people call this place. When I write in Hebrew, I write Sha'ar Shkhem, and I don't write Sha'ar Damasek. I don't write Damascus Gate. But if I write in English, I will write Damascus Gate, and in Arabic I write Bab el-Amud. You, Yusuf, you said you park your car at St. Stephen's gate, and you didn't say Bab el-Asbat and you didn't say Sha'ar Ariot.

But sometimes, you know, people may not understand where exactly St. Stephen's gate is located. But I think that when we talk about the Temple Mount, that is the name in English, so I would say in English Temple Mount, but in Hebrew I would say Har HaBayit, and in Arabic Al-Aqsa or al-Haram al-Sharif.

What Israel is doing is "redeeming the sites", putting them in a Jewish context. But I would like to say something additional. As a journalist I was involved in the Israeli-Palestinian political negotiations for many, many years. Almost since the occupation was begun in 1967. In most of the negotiations, we established an order. Which is more important and more difficult and more problematic in our issues, be they our settlements, our borders, the nature of the Palestinian entity or state, and of course,

Jerusalem and refugees. Usually, in most years, refugees were at the top.

That was the most difficult issue. If you ask an Israeli, can Israel survive without Gaza? People used to tell you that Israel could not survive without Gaza and the settlements. Today we know we can survive without the settlements in Gaza. Israel can also survive without the settlements in the West Bank.

Israel can survive without the Jewish neighborhoods in Jerusalem, and Israel can survive without the Western Wall. But Israel cannot survive with a right of return if it is implemented, there will be no state of Israel. If the right of return were implemented, and there would be, I don't know, five or seven million refugees, according to Palestinian data, using their definition of who is a refugee.

Okay, even with the U.N. and even with one million refugees, Israel cannot survive. That is my opinion. But if we pull back to the 1967 borders, Israel can survive.

I can do the same with the Palestinian side. I don't want to elaborate here, only the bottom line.

The Palestinian state cannot survive without Jerusalem. For me, there's a similarity here. Israel cannot survive with the refugees, and the Palestinian state cannot be established, cannot survive; there will be no Palestinian state without Jerusalem. At least without most of Jerusalem.

Can a Palestinian state be established without the right of return? My answer is yes, with difficulties, but the answer is yes. With some Israeli settlements? The answer is yes.

Without Jerusalem? The answer is no. East Jerusalem, of course.

But by the way, it was not so after 1967. It changed, the order of importance. Jerusalem was less important before 1967 for many reasons. Because of politics, because it was Jordan, and Jerusalem was not the capital, it was in Amman. Palestine needed a capital, and the capital cannot be in Halhul or in Jenin or in Ramallah. There are many reasons, and one of the reasons is that Palestinian society and Israeli society have both become more religious. And the status of the religious shrines is much more important today than it used to be. I remember the fire in al-Aqsa in August 1969. I was there. There were some demonstrations, but it was not a huge trauma for the Palestinian society at that time. Today if it would occur, I don't know what would happen.

When I used to go to book stores in East Jerusalem at that time, I found only Marxist books; Lenin and Marx in Arabic. It was a different style of society, a different nature. That is not the discourse now.

I have tried even to simplify my short presentation, so that you understand that the only solution that I can see here is without refugees and Jerusalem. More or less, because now I don't think the Palestinians can live without Jerusalem, and I don't think Israel can live with the right of return.

With regard to Jerusalem, I don't even have to argue. I remember from Camp David in 2000; I was there. I remember when President Clinton asked Arafat, when they discussed Jerusalem. Arafat told him, "I or you will call five or six Arab leaders. If you find even one of them who will agree to this, I am ready to do it. Because from the Palestinian point of view, and not only the Palestinian point of view, the Temple Mount doesn't belong to the Palestinians themselves. It is not their private property, and it is

not Arafat's private property, it is the Arab nations, the one billion Muslims. No chance that the Palestinians will give it away. They simply will not do it. So it's very simple to me.

TAMAR HERMANN: I would like to expand on something that Danny mentioned, that Israeli society is turning more religious. I would say that the problem is turning more nationalistic, and not that the society is turning more religious. And I can support my argument with the findings that we have from our public opinion surveys.

When we ask about the issue of sovereignty over the Temple Mount, we refer to Har Ha'Bayit and not Haram-al-Sharif, because I am referring only to our Jewish sample. In the beginning it was quite a puzzling finding for us but later on, when we discussed it with people who better understand the operational code, if you wish, of the Orthodox sectors in Israel, we found out that both the secular Israelis and the national religious camp attribute high importance to the issue of Israeli sovereignty to the Temple Mount, unlike the ultra-Orthodox community.

The ultra-Orthodox interviewees in our samples couldn't care less who is the sovereign over the Temple Mount, because for them the state means very little in terms of the religious value or importance of the Temple Mount. It gets more and more crucial for certain sectors, but certainly it is not related in a linear way to the level of religiosity in Israeli society. I am not an expert on the Palestinian side, so I cannot comment on it.

As to Jerusalem in return for the refugee issue, this is also very important. Yesterday I mentioned the changes in narratives that are deeper. There are changes in cognition, I would say, since 1994, when we began this project. We have found that the definition of Jerusalem is changing. The definition of this so-called "undivided Jerusalem" is shrinking. There are certain parts of Jerusalem which are not considered any more to be part of the core Jerusalem that Israeli Jews are unwilling to give up.

For example, we found that almost all of the neighborhoods bearing Arabic names are not considered any more as part of this indivisible Jerusalem, whereas in the past they were. This doesn't mean the Old City at the core, but who knows? Some taboos have been broken and from this point of view Oslo has not failed in terms of changing attitudes. Some people would think it is a catastrophe, but if we are thinking in terms of changing the red lines, then I would say that Jerusalem is a wonderful example of a case where a total taboo turned into something debatable.

However, the refugee issue is still a big no. We haven't found any sector in Israeli Jewish society that is willing to accept the basic recognition of Israel's responsibility for the creation of the refugee issue, let alone any acceptance of an option of practical absorption within the state of Israel any number whatsoever of Palestinian refugees.

MOHAMMED DAJANI: Yitzhak said Palestinians didn't realize how much Jerusalem meant to Jews. Actually I agree and disagree with this statement. I think that Palestinians do realize how important Jerusalem is to Jews but they don't realize how much the city is embedded in Jewish religious culture. From when I was young I remember very well the statement of, "*Im eshkach yerushalayim, tishkach y'mini*", "If I forget Jerusalem, let my right hand lose its strength," or the Jewish saying, "Next year in Jerusalem." On the other hand, Zionists keep undermining the significance of Jerusalem

to Muslims since the name of the city is not mentioned explicitly in the Quran.

So it is the Temple Mount which we have questions about. Between 1995 and 2000, I was involved in second-track meetings with Israelis on Jerusalem. In these meetings we used to discuss all aspects in Jerusalem. These meetings were organized by IPCRI (the Israeli-Palestinian Center for Research and Information), the Peres Center, and Orient House, among others. I remember that I made a presentation here in Istanbul in 1997 when we discussed the issue of Jerusalem. My point is that all throughout these meetings never was the Temple Mount brought up. Not once did we discuss the Israeli claim of sovereignty on the Temple Mount in the discussions on Jerusalem. Never did the Israelis say they want sovereignty on the Temple Mount. I don't remember reading any article or declaration stating that. We discussed settlements in Jerusalem, we discussed the municipality, we discussed sovereignty, we discussed everything, but not the Temple. Actually, a few weeks before the Camp David Summit, we had a meeting in Cyprus with the Israelis, sponsored by the Cypriot Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In our group there were participants from the President's office, from the security services, from the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation. In the morning sessions the Israelis asked, "What if we withdrew to 1967? What are you willing to concede to us?" They were talking about Jerusalem. And this was the first time that the Israelis used this language.

And so we said, "Okay, what do you expect in return?" They said: "Three things: (1) sovereignty over the Jewish Quarter, (b) sovereignty over the Wailing Wall, and (c) sovereignty over the big settlements around Jerusalem, such as Pisgat Ze'ev and Ma'aleh Adumim."

So the Palestinians were surprised, since we had been meeting with Israelis before but this was the first time that they discussed with us negotiating over Jerusalem. So we said, "Okay, we will adjourn the meeting," and then later, during the meeting of the Palestinian team, many said, "Maybe this is a trap, to tell the press we gave in on Jerusalem."

So when we went back to the meeting with the Israelis, some Palestinians expressed reservations, and I have this on the record because it was transcribed, and I said, "This will be an excellent deal." When we went back home, these ideas were reported to President Arafat.

A few years ago, there was a conference at Tel Aviv University about Camp David and after, and I was chairing one of the sessions. Ehud Barak attended every session of that conference, sitting in the first row, and people on the panel, Israelis and Americans, were attacking Arafat, saying that when he flew to Camp David he never had any intention of making a deal, that he didn't want to make a deal.

And so, as the Chair, I took the prerogative to comment on these remarks. I said, it is not true, because this is what happened with us. That when Arafat was flying there, he had in his mind the idea that he could make a deal, because he thought that what the Israelis proposed in Nicosia were trial balloons, the perception was that the Israelis were sending him signals telling him what is their ceiling. So on the plane to the US, he may have been thinking that he can make a deal he can live with, giving away the Wailing Wall or the Jewish Quarter or the main settlements. He can live without these if he gets back East Jerusalem as the capital of the Palestinian State.

So I said from the podium, “Mr. Prime Minister, excuse me but you pulled two rabbits out of the hat. Barak was looking at me and clearly wondering, “What is he talking about?”

I said, “First, you said you wanted the sovereignty over Haram-al-Sharif, and this was not on the negotiating table. Arafat couldn't deliver this, because this is an Islamic Waqf, and you would put him in opposition to the whole Islamic world, and even if he would have said yes, the Islamic world would not have accepted that”.

“And the second rabbit that you pulled was that you wanted sovereignty over the Armenian Quarter, which was not also on the negotiating table, and you would have had Arafat facing the Christian world.”

I remember some of Arafat's people calling me wondering, “Did the Israelis ever discuss this issue of the Temple Mount or the Armenian Quarter in any of your meetings? Why are they now demanding sovereignty over the Armenian Quarter? What is its significance?” And I explained, “because it is at the entrance to the Wailing Wall from Jaffa Gate. They want the security to go there; they don't want just one entry to it.”

So basically, I think this issue of the Temple Mount was dumped on our table without any prior warning that it has much significance, and because also the Palestinians were under the impression all the time that Jews cannot pray there since it is a holy place. You know, it was Dayan who ordered the Israeli flag taken down from the Aqsa Mosque in June 1967, when the Old City was occupied. So Palestinians thought all the time that this was not an issue and the Jews can live with the fact that the Haram-al-Sharif is under Islamic control.

I think it was raised as a political issue because Barak did not want to make a deal because the Israeli security senior officials warned him that the Israeli public was not yet ready for peace. And when Barak went up on stage at the meeting, he attacked all those who criticized him, and made it very clear that it was upon their recommendation that he didn't make a deal.

JEFF HELSING: We are going to break with tradition and have you answer that question now.

YUSUF NATSHEH: Concerning the visitors, I should tell you that Jerusalem is not a place of *hajj* or pilgrimage actually, but it is a place of *ziara*, a small *hajj*. So it's not obligatory to visit Jerusalem, but if you are in Jerusalem, you have to pray.

To compare the city with others, it's not Medina, it's not a capital like Cairo, it's not like Baghdad, but it is a regional, provincial city. No one can deny the attachment even of non-Arabs for the city. There are about two or three hundred Muslims from all over the Islamic world who wish to be buried in Jerusalem, and there are cemetery stones that reflect what the city means as the Holy Land to Muslims.

AS'AD GHANEM: The most important thing is that Jerusalem has been the capital of the Palestinian national movement since its beginning, which was after the First World War. This is the point, not the fact that Muslims come or will come. It is not important at all from my point of view. I mean this mosque, as a religious place, is not important for seventy percent of Palestinians, really. But as a national place, this is the thing.

ADEL MANNA': Firstly, to the two questions of my neighbor, Mohammed Dajani.

Frankly, I don't think that these kinds of questions of competition or symmetry are useful. We have spoken many times about not looking for symmetry in different societies and different situations. Raising these questions does not help us.

Nonetheless, since the questions were raised, I would like to point out that during Ottoman times, there was *al hajj al kabir*, the big pilgrimage to Mecca and the *hajj al saghir*, the smaller pilgrimage. Many Muslims on their donkeys, while coming back from Mecca and Medina, came first to al-Khalil, that is, Hebron, and then to Jerusalem. The pilgrimage to Nebi Musa was at a different time, and the week of Nebi Musa is something different. This shows that Muslim pilgrims didn't come to Jerusalem directly, because it's not a place of pilgrimage, but nonetheless they made a small pilgrimage to Jerusalem after the pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina, which shows a lot about the attachments of the Muslims for hundreds of years to this place.

Now, concerning books, I don't think if you figure out how many books there are about al-Ka'aba in Mecca and about Mecca itself, which are of course the holiest places for Islam, that you will find more than five hundred or one thousand books. Does that mean that al-Ka'aba and Mecca are not important, since there are one million books in English about Jerusalem? So what? This is more or less the issue.

While we are speaking about the importance of al-Haram al-Sharif, or the Temple Mount, for both societies and for all nations, and trying to find out how we can move ahead for a peace, other people are doing something else. I would like to ask about those groups on both sides of the divide. On the Israeli side there are many groups, as you know, of radical fundamentalists and others, who try to rebuild the Temple Mount. This is one of the most dangerous things which can happen. Many groups, few people.

I would like to ask Yitzhak Reiter and Yusuf Natsheh, who know much better than I do, to tell me about those groups, and how they see their danger in the future.

From the other side there are Palestinian leaders like Ra'ed Salah who became famous in the Arab world by saying that "*al-Aqsa fihatar*," that al-Aqsa is in danger.

ESHEL KLINHOUSE: Two small remarks about the importance of the Kotel, known as the Western Wall or the Wailing Wall in English. For me growing up in a kibbutz, mostly secular -- and I don't want to make Mickey Rosen sweat by telling him what we do on Yom Kippur in order to describe how secular we are -- but even then they took me for my bar mitzvah to the *Kotel* and I read the *parsha*, and I had *tefillin* on my head, which gives an indication of how important it is even for completely secular Israeli Jews.

Now, concerning al-Haram al-Sharif, Har Ha'Bayit: In 1967, Moshe Dayan decided that we wouldn't take over the control of it, and allowed the Waqf to control it. Maybe afterwards, on the political level, we said that we owned this place. But on the ground, we had already given it up.

Now, two things about the narrative that Yusuf has presented. Sometimes academics tend to forget that historical knowledge is going down and being used and being manipulated and abused in different ways, so you have to consider your responsibility in dealing with it, and how it enters the curriculum, schools and so forth.

For example, about the Palestinian narrative concerning Har Ha'Bayit and the Haram-al-Sharif. From my knowledge, it seems to me that the Palestinian narrative is that the Jews are aiming to demolish, to destroy, to steal the Haram-al-Sharif from the

Muslims. This is the music behind the stories or the facts that the Palestinians are telling themselves or telling the students in their textbooks.

For example, this crazy Australian who tried to burn down the mosque in 1969 was obviously not sent by the Jews; he was obviously not sent by the Zionist movement, even though the story fits like a glove to this narrative, that the Jews are willing to steal or destroy the Temple Mount.

I ask Yusuf, what is your responsibility in dismantling this bomb? What do you do when you see these facts, what do you do to move it away in order to present another narrative?

Now, obviously, I can see that the Israelis are doing the same things on different issues. However, when I meet a Palestinian teacher, this is so obvious that I have to mention it.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: The Jews took over the al-Haram-al-Ibrahimi in Hebron, so don't be amazed that they can also do it in Jerusalem.

ESHEL KLINHOURSE: No, I am asking you, do you truly believe that the Jews are excavating underneath the Haram-al-Sharif in order to bring it down? Because the common belief in the Palestinian narrative is that they might appropriate it or might destroy it. And I want to give you an example how to dismantle one of these conceptual bombs, these historical facts (or non-facts) that are used by people who don't want to promote peace.

For example, in my classes we read the Quran. Not in the history lesson, because we have to keep up with preparing for the *bagrut*, but we are reading it. And you know, in the Quran Jerusalem is not mentioned, and we read about this journey by Mohammed to al-Aqsa. When people read this *Sura*, how do they react?

Some say that Jerusalem is not there. It is not in the Quran. So we the Jews should own Jerusalem.

But what should a responsible teacher, a responsible academic, do? How should he answer them? Like we said about the Exodus, it doesn't really matter if Mohammed was there or not; this is their belief. I am not telling you something new.

But I wonder, at this table I hear that everyone is very, very concerned about the truth, about his academic integrity and so on, and does this academic integrity relate to how this history is getting through to people not at universities?

MOSHE MAOZ: What about the names? Number one. In Jerusalem, on the East side, the names are in Arabic, Salah ad-din and others.

Number two, very amusing. In West Jerusalem, some of the neighborhoods that were initially Arab, their names were changed into Hebrew, but it didn't catch on. Baka. I live in Malcha -- no one uses the Hebrew. Katamon. Gonen. Abu-Tor. Talbia. So it is very interesting to think why this happened. They were changed officially but kept by the people, by Jews. Interesting. Maybe nostalgia.

Number three, about Jerusalem. Yusuf mentioned it. I will call it "conditional holiness". When Jerusalem was captured by Crusaders, you had so many books in praise of Jerusalem and so on and so forth. And with the Zionist movement, too, I think somebody else also mentioned that Jerusalem was not important for a long time. The main center was Tel Aviv and the kibbutzim. I remember that Chaim Weizmann never wanted to go to Jerusalem, he didn't like it. But after 1948 and 1967, it became

different.

Sufian Abu Zayda, a Palestinian Authority leader, has written a PhD thesis; he just finished a book on this issue, the attitude of the Zionist movement towards Jerusalem over the years.

Now, about the importance of Jerusalem, we don't have to emphasize it here. Not only for Palestinians, but for the Muslim world. I meet many personalities, many academic leaders from Iran, from Germany, Afghanistan, Indonesia and others. And they said, if you and the Palestinians would settle this issue of Jerusalem, then the attitude of Muslim countries to Israel would change. We have heard this from Musharraf in Pakistan, for example, so we have to see it in the larger context.

BENJAMIN POGRUND: The political situation opens the way to manipulation and to a lot of cynicism. Mohammed spoke a lot about that from the Muslim point of view, and Tamar spoke about how the Jewish definition of Jerusalem is changing, and there we have a great deal of cynicism.

In 1967, Jerusalem was enormously expanded. It became wholly indivisible. It was done for political reasons after the conquest. As we know, Jerusalem is poverty-stricken because of the nature of its communities. The municipality has been anxious to incorporate nearby Mevasseret Zion, because living there are the Jewish "refugees" who fled from Jerusalem for all sorts of reasons. They are high taxpayers.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Wealthy refugees.

BENJAMIN POGRUND: And one of these days Jerusalem will succeed in incorporating that area for tax reasons, and that will be holy, wholly indivisible, eternal Jerusalem. So the cynicism is on both sides. We must remember that and be very careful about it.

You spoke about conditional holiness, and I think that is a very important thing. In our book, *Shared Histories*, Moshe Amirav dealt with the history of Jerusalem, and how the attitudes changed. It is a very instructive chapter to read.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: He suggested our capital should be in Tel Aviv, no?

BENJAMIN POGRUND: He said that, initially, yes. He said that Jerusalem hadn't been wanted as a capital, and he described how that changed over time.

What do we do about it, though? I found, in my experience as a journalist, that religion is the most divisive issue. It overtakes money, even sex. It gets people hopping in a way that no other issue does. It motivates people.

It is a truism that religion has been hugely divisive over the centuries. A great deal of blood has flowed in the world because of religion. Today, I read that it is the Christians who are getting the worst of it all around the world. They are the most oppressed people in the world in many ways.

But of course religion can also be a way to bring people together. If we could overcome the problem that Adel raised about which God are we talking about: Is it the same God for all of us? Is it a uniquely Jewish God? Is it a Muslim God? That hasn't been resolved between us.

But from your point of view, how do we reach an accord on Jerusalem? Picking up on the spirit of what we were talking about in the last session, where do we go? We know the problems. How do we overcome them? Are there solutions?

DALIA OFER: If East Jerusalem will be Palestinian, it will be *Ir Katseh*, a city on

or of the edge. It is not a border. But if this will be the case for Jerusalem, it will be bad both for Jewish Jerusalem and for Palestinian Jerusalem. And therefore as a Jerusalemite, one who was born in Jerusalem and who lives in Jerusalem, I think that it is very important to find a way, somehow, to prevent it from being a city of *katseh*, a city of the edge or border. So, how to divide the sovereignty, and how to rule the city so that both sides will be able to manage, is an issue for both Palestine and Israel.

Second, I really think what you said, Eshel, about how we get these ideas into different parts of society is important, and this is a great example. If you read the Quran, and you say exactly what you said, the fact that it's not mentioned in the Quran doesn't mean anything about the strong feelings about al-Haram al-Sharif or Jerusalem.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: But it is mentioned in the Quran as Bait Al-Maqdes. I don't know how many times, but it is mentioned in the Quran.

ILAN TROEN: The reality today is very strange and very difficult reality, which is that Jerusalem has meant different things at different times. Today the Jewish population is defined by the gerrymandered borders that include 650,000 people. That's an absurdity. I know of no place in the 20th century where a modern people has built a large metropolis in a mountain and invested so many resources in creating the poorest city in their country. There is no river, nor a port. There may be a minor airport to the north of the city. But there is no economic base.

Someplace else I have written about this, that Jerusalem is the largest development town in the history of Israeli society. And the money keeps pouring in and pouring in, to artificially sustain the city. It is the poorest city in Israel per capita. It has no economic foundation. It is not a place that produces wealth; rather, it drains wealth from Israeli society. That has been the case since the 1950s. And it hasn't changed today. It is a place for the transfer of resources from the productive to the non-productive part of Israel.

I don't know that the Arab part of Jerusalem is any wealthier or productive. Both sections of the city are not ideal if you want to make a good living. It is a religious imagination or a contemporary political and nationalistic imagination that is really at stake, and that is what drives the decisions of politicians and actions in the ground.

I do not underestimate the power of any kind of imagination. I am very impressed by what Israel was able to do after it lost the city in the 1948 war, when it was besieged. What happened between 1948 and 1967 was quite extraordinary. The newly independent State of Israel built a new Jerusalem. Har Herzl became in effect a replacement for the Temple Mount and the Mount of Olives. It became the place of national festivals and celebrations. They took place on the modern and western side of the city rather than the traditional eastern side. The new portion of the city was invested with the Hall of the Nation, Binyanei Ha'Uma, and the new campus of the Hebrew University. Had the 1967 war not occurred, I don't think Israel would be much troubled about what took place on the east side of Jerusalem except for one issue, and that is one of access.

I know of no plans, and there may be people who know the secrets better than I do, for irredentism until 1967. There was no plan to conquer the lost eastern portion of Jerusalem. There were plans in the drawers for many eventualities. That's a sign of a good military, and Israel had a good military. But there were no political plans, there

were no military plans and there was no mobilization, there was an acceptance of a *fait accompli*.

There was widespread acceptance that Jerusalem had been divided. I have always found that to be a terrible and powerful story about the power of the community to engage in, not collective memory, but collective imagination, or re-imagination.

I don't know if what Danny says is true or not, whether Israel can give up much of what it has done since then in creating a city of 650,000. But I would commend to all of us that it is the power of the imagination, maybe on all sides, given certain realities of trying to reconfigure and reassess, rather than being drawn into the past which you want us to escape so rigorously. But it has been before, and maybe it can be done again.

In order for Israelis to give up eastern portions of the city, they would have to trust the other side. After all, the complaint until 1967 was that there was no access. Jews could not go through the gates, whether it was St. Stephen's Gate or the Barzel Gate or the Dung Gate; they couldn't get into the Old City. They could not access the old campus of the Hebrew University on Mount Scopus. Much of the Old City was destroyed, the Jewish portion of it. The roads were taken up. The cemetery on the Mount of Olives was mistreated. And lack of respect for holy places of another religion is not the past. It is the present. The dispute in Nazareth between Christians and Muslims is greatly upsetting, when one witnesses an attack on a church by Muslim fundamentalists, or on the status of Christians. I just came to our session this morning from the Hagia Sophia, the church that was transformed into a mosque. How long did the Byzantines rule this place, only to have its symbols taken down after losing the city.

Keep in mind that Jerusalem is not important for the religious alone. I will remind everybody that one of the most powerful images in contemporary Israeli history is not a person with forelocks and a fur cap and a black coat praying at the Wall, or of kids having their bar mitzvah there. Perhaps the most powerful contemporary image is of the bare-headed soldier at the Wall during the conquest of the 1967 war. The power of Jerusalem in the imagination of many secular Jews is beyond measurement. And it is their concerns that have to be allayed.

YASSER ABU KHATER: I just want to talk about how many ways Jerusalem is very important for the Arabs and Muslims, and I think not so important for the Jews.

There is a custom that Muslim pilgrims, when they come back from Mecca, they are supposed to come by way of Jerusalem. There are many Syrians and Lebanese and Turks who come here to pray for three or four days, and they continue on their way north. Even in the Christmas season we have many Lebanese-Palestinian Christians coming to Jerusalem.

The second point: we usually hear the Israeli leaders, before this election and that election, saying Jerusalem will be the eternal capital of Israel. All Jerusalem, east and west. But if we look on the ground, Jerusalem has been divided for 20 years.

From the Six Day War until the first Intifada, if anybody came to Jerusalem on a Saturday, there was no problem wandering around. But now, I don't think an Israeli can walk freely in East Jerusalem. That means that Jerusalem is divided. The mentality of each Israeli and each Palestinian is divided. So that means if you look for sovereignty, the Israelis don't have full sovereignty for all Jerusalem. That is what I can say. They

can't go to Salah ad-din Street or the Old City. And this is where Danny was right; that he thinks Israel can survive without Jerusalem. I agree with him.

YUSUF NATSHEH: To Adel, I think that there is a real danger concerning the excavations. It is a very big issue, and it is an annoying issue. There is real fear, of two things in my opinion. The first fear is of those rightwing extremist groups who keep announcing that they are going to build the Third Temple, that they are going to prepare the cornerstone of the Third Temple.

But for the Muslims, for the people who are living there, there is real fear of any act, any behavior related to building the Third Temple. The danger is not just physical but also intellectual and educational. One serious example of the misuse of education and educational institutions is the response of a certain rabbi to the question, "When will the third temple be built?" He said we would like to build the temple in the minds of the people first. So we can see that the role of many of the educational centers and museums is not mere education and knowledge but in order to pave the way and convince the audience for a specific agenda.

A further example of the misrepresentation of education is related to monuments. The Tankizziyya - a very important theological school from the Mamluk period - was confiscated in 1969 by the Israeli authorities for security purposes. What is the feeling of a Palestinian when he discovers that the part of it which looks towards the al-Haram al-Sharif is transferred to a synagogue?

When you go to the excavation of the Western Wall Tunnel, you will see another synagogue there, newly constructed in a big Muslim hall of the Ayyubid period. The Israelis avoid mentioning it is a Mamluk or Ayyubid structure. Instead they say medieval. Why is it called medieval? Because "Mamluk" will frighten them. It will make Israeli Jews nervous. It is a replacement, it is a denial, of the Arab heritage and hence a denial of their rights. This is how education and excavations are manipulated.

Today, come with me and you will see at each gate of the Haram, there are five policemen. How can we explain that the police spend millions and millions to surround the al-Aqsa and the Haram-al-Sharif with an electric fence that is detecting every act, every voice and every movement. This is a reflection of what exists in Israeli society. And whether you accept it or not, this is a serious threat.

YITZHAK REITER: Of course it is a threat, but this is not an Israeli plot --

YUSUF NATSHEH: But who says Hamas represents all the Palestinians? Not truly, but this is our mosaic. This is how we have on both sides the moderate and the fanatic, the right wing and left wing and so why do you take Hamas or Jihad seriously? And I don't have the right to take these Israeli extremist groups seriously as well?

Once I attended a lecture on Islamic architecture by a very prominent scholar at the Hebrew University. It is about the city of Ramle and was given at Albright Institute at Salah ad-Din street in East Jerusalem. She showed slides of the tower of Ramle with the big menorah installed on top. The menorah is about two or three meters. The tower of Ramle is well-known as a Mamluk construction serving as minaret for the mosque.

So after the lecture I asked this woman, whom I had heard speak many times, what is this? She told me not to worry. I said why? You are showing an Islamic site in Ramle with a menorah just above it. I understand that you know that the site is Muslim, but what about the kids and the public in Ramle? We are educators and we are

intelligent, and we have a responsibility. Our responsibility is to convey the truth and to identify monuments within their historical context, not to deform their identification by adding unrelated symbols. It is really a serious disappointment for me to see a famous minaret dominated by a menorah.

Another misuse of heritage is when I was denied access by the Ministry of Interior, to go and visit the confiscated Tankiziyya theological school, adjacent to al-Haram al-Sharif with a group of Israeli policemen, to guide them there. Ironically, later I went there with a group of Israeli tour guides, and really, this is discrimination. As an Arab I was denied access but as an Israeli I was allowed, and this is really a serious problem showing how the role of education is manipulated, something both societies suffer from. We should look at both sides, and we should hear the complaints and concerns from both sides if we are going to bridge gaps.

YITZHAK REITER: The Temple Mount Movement and other Temple organizations; they are small in numbers, but I also agree that they are dangerous. Although the Israeli police and the government make every effort to protect the Temple Mount, I see the main point of friction as the role of education in the public discourse. They are infiltrating into the public discourse with their ideas, and they disseminate them to the Israeli public.

Now I would like to make only one important point. Perhaps I was naive to think that I was invited to a conference on narratives and not on political solutions, but I would strongly disagree with Danny Rubinstein that Jerusalem or the Haram-al-Sharif could be traded off with the issue of the refugees. The issue of the Temple Mount/al-Haram al-Sharif became a symbol of identity, not only for religious Jews, but also for the secular sectors in Israeli society. It is a fundamental part of Israeli identity. There is a Mina Tzemach poll from February 2005 in which it was found that fifty-one percent of Israeli Jews rejected Palestinian control of the Temple Mount, about thirty-seven percent agreed to a joint Israeli-Palestinian administration, and nine percent of Jews agreed that the Haram should be under full Palestinian control.

DANNY RUBINSTEIN: Do you know that it is the same percentage of Palestinians who say they would give up the right of return?

YITZHAK REITER: This debate is being aggravated to the extreme, and I think the only way to overcome the conflict is one of two solutions. One is based on the fact that Israel seeks, first of all, to get acknowledgment by Palestinians of its attachment to the *kodesh ha'k'doshim*, the Holy of Holies of the ancient Temple. If there will be Palestinian, or Palestinian Muslim, language, even just a rhetorical expression, that they acknowledge the Jewish historical role in this place, I think it will compensate, and it will positively influence Israeli public opinion in this regard.

And since I believe that such an expression could not be delivered at the present time, the other alternative is to give a third party control over the Old City and the compound, which would delegate powers to both sides to administer holy places that they do control anyway today.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yitzhak, this will only happen when we have a political breakthrough.

