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# Shared Public Space and Peacemaking: New Visions of Place in Israel and Palestine

MARC GOPIN

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In the fall of 2000, the Temple Mount emerged as one of the most important objects in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict—a symbol of the struggle between the Jewish and Muslim communities. At the same time, this development marks only the latest phase in a much larger war over the ownership of contested space and its significance in all three of the Abrahamic religions. Whatever situation exists in the future, based on agreement or based on the force of war, there will be Palestinian spaces wanted by Israelis, Israeli spaces wanted by Palestinians, and a variety of spaces uncomfortably shared by both. The exclusive ownership of space will continue to foster deep wounds inside millions of people connected to this land. This is a fight over the space of home, something which evokes the most astonishing levels of violence the world over.

The success or failure of any peace process in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will hinge on the parties' ability to envision a new approach to dealing with contested space. Bearing this in mind, how can our insights into culture and religion be used to mitigate the severity of the contest? I offer here only some initial thoughts on the subject, thoughts that will need to be developed further by the parties and operationalized alongside other paths of conflict resolution and reconciliation.

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## THE CONCEPT OF SACRED SPACE

The sacralization of space is one of the most powerful phenomena within human religions around the world. In polytheistic traditions, this experience of sacralization can have a rather diffuse quality. In other words, because the sacred and actual deities can be found in many different places and objects, it could be argued that there is less intensity around exclusive ownership over particular sacred locations. This may or may not be true in the actual historical relationships of competing polytheistic tribes. It is quite possible that as the power and identity of deities merge with the land aspirations of a particular tribe or empire, the

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drive to be victorious over other "gods" and their holy places may result in as much bloodshed as monotheistic wars over sacred space. There is simply no way to document all the different times in human history where tribal war over land was framed as a war between competing gods, and then to decide which, monotheism or polytheism, has employed the sacred more often or to a greater degree in a fight for space.

What is important for our practical purposes is to understand that the monotheistic vision of the world, from biblical drives of conquest all the way to the Crusades and Mohammed's mission, has often expressed itself politically as a strong drive to create exclusive sacred space. This holds true particularly where the chosen, superior group is seen to have hegemony over an inferior group. The human drive to have enemies should be seen to be interactive with what I would say is a human need to have inferiors.

The notion of chosenness, as it expresses itself in all three Abrahamic religions, easily feeds this drive, but it is land that most provokes these negative cultural dynamics in all of these communities. Even more importantly, however, it is the deeply embedded struggle over the search for a secure home. Monotheism's reinforcement of this is by way of a determined obsession with exclusive ownership of land, as well as its ownership by the group (or the son, such as Isaac, Ishmael, or Jesus) most favored by God. Often a group is favored now precisely because it had been previously persecuted. This rootedness in the righteous repair of historical wrongs creates an impenetrable psychological web—at least impenetrable by rational discourse.

This is the main Abrahamic contribution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with disputed sacred space everywhere. From the West Bank, where Judea and Samaria—the lands sacred to Judaism—lie, to the holiness of Jerusalem for all

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three faiths, the sacredness of the space is the subject and object of the dispute for millions of people. Furthermore, as the conflict intensifies, sacred space seems to become more and more—well, sacred. As it becomes centralized mythologically, new “holy” sites, such as burial places, are discovered, or re-discovered, thus transforming them into objects of jealous veneration.

Although outside the geographic boundaries of the conflict, Western Christians are found on both sides of this militarization of sacred space. Many support the needs and interests of Palestinians, while others, through their messianic and apocalyptic lens, support the militarization of Jewish occupation of that space. This can be seen as a proxy war with Islam and as a fulfillment of the future wars and deaths necessary for the return of Jesus.

### RELIGIOUS INTERPRETATION AND SHARING OF SACRED SPACE

The sacralization of monotheistic space is clearly a conflict-generating phenomenon of the Israeli-Palestinian dispute. Does it have to be? The answer is going to depend heavily on the future of religious interpretation in the context of socio-cultural developments on both sides. One could imagine things quite differently. For example, the most religiously conservative in all three faiths share a belief in the past engagement of God and human being in this space of the biblical land of Israel. All of them accept the validity of the prophecies from that most ancient period, even if later prophecies “fulfill” or are more “perfect” versions of the previous one.

Is not this shared spirituality, housed in the Hebrew Bible, or Old Testament, a sufficient condition to explore the kind of human moral interaction God expected in this sacred space? This needs to be the central preoccupation of the peacemakers in the region. Instead of focusing exclusively on the question of ownership, they must articulate and come to agreement upon shared interpersonal moral requirements for the occupation of sacred space. There is the possibility of creating consensus here and of arriving at standards that will even the playing field, and demonstrate how all parties to this conflict have a long way to go in terms of living up to prophetic visions for the occupation of sacred space. This prism through which to view the conflict also creates the possibility of a united front against violence on sacred ground, against theft on sacred ground, and against disrespect that takes place on sacred ground, no matter who the perpetrator is.

The biblical prophets make a strong case that the entire point of the monotheistic program is that (a) God is the owner of space, not human beings; and that (b) one's residence on sacred space depends exclusively on one's moral behavior and approach to the fundamental questions of justice, compassion, and humility.<sup>1</sup> This is especially pertinent to the evaluation of behavior towards vulnerable groups, such as widows, orphans, the poor, and strangers.<sup>2</sup> It goes without saying that each party

in a warring community sees itself as the vulnerable group, and it is the sting of their own deaths by violence that stimulates their moral outrage. Each will see the righteous indignation of the biblical text as a defense of its own position.

Or will they? The beauty of the textual embrace of justice and righteousness is that it opens up the possibility of objective, shared standards. Religious faith in divine justice, as with secular human rights documents and constitutions, binds the moral relationship between self and other, or collective self and collective other. When this happens, the reaction can no longer be that you are essentially evil. Now it is concerned with what you did that is wrong by standards upon which we both, or should both, agree. That takes the interaction into a different and superior moral universe. It makes room, at least in principle, for self-examination, parallel grievances, parallel reparations, and shared goals. If the two combatants are the two bottom corners of a triangle, then moral and spiritual standards are the top corner, requiring the bottom corners to look up and beyond themselves in order to complete their identity.

By contrast, ethnic or religious group identity and mob psychology left to itself is completely narcissistic. It is capable of eliminationist rhetoric and behavior, both of which close all possibility of coexistence and transforming of relationships. Although monotheists are capable of eliminationist rhetoric and behavior as well, for

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many of those whom this author has interviewed, genocidal thinking is a tough fit, no matter what the ancient biblical texts may say. We have seen an interesting benefit of some effects of the Enlightenment and the success of the human rights enterprise on monotheistic psychology, each of which combine well with a natural tendency of people to find the

slaughter of innocents revolting. This can and often is supported in monotheistic religiosity by an intuitive feeling of what God sees as ideal human behavior. Thus, despite the previously mentioned obsessions with chosenness, there are countervailing spiritual tendencies at work here. Additionally, they can play a pivotal role in minimizing the extent of violence when they interact well with moral, religious texts.

The real question is not whether a case can be made for monotheistic sacred space that focuses more on interpersonal action than human ownership. The question should be why this plea falls so often on deaf ears, especially among those who purport to be the most conservative and the most exclusively devoted to defense of religious traditions? This is the more productive question that conflict analysts must ask. We cannot dismiss as hypocrisy the re-readings of sacred texts that ignore the moral conditions of occupation. Hypocrisy is a moral judgment. It is true that religious peacemakers have every right to consider oppression, terrorism, or killing to protect sacred space as a repugnant inversion of God's will. At the same time, however, this

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view does little to improve our understanding of the violent religious cultures that we see before us, whether it be Rabbi Meir Kahane's followers in Israel or Hamas and Islamic Jihad.<sup>3</sup> Without deep, empathetic understanding and analysis, there is no strategy for resolving the dispute. Furthermore, conflict analysis theory, in order to be effective, must ask its questions from inside the culture. Of course, such analysis must also take place alongside external analyses of power, economics, and psychology.

From a secular Western point of view, the only way to coexist with religion is for religion to relinquish its authority over large spaces and times, thus making room for a secular public order. This necessity has old roots in the division of power between kings and popes that took hundreds of years and much bloodshed to develop. Even long before them, Jewish priests and kings, and also prophets and kings, struggled with the same issue. Thus, there is precedent in monotheistic literature for public space and division of powers. However, sacralized space has become the home in modern times to millions of people alienated from secular culture, a great escape from the psychological ravages of mass civilization. In the case of fundamentalism, it is a home barricaded with high walls and barbed wire. The challenge then is not to convince the affected people to de-sacralize space and time, but to re-envision sacralization in a way that is not destructive, but constructive, that is not exclusive at each and every place and time, but occasionally shared. This task calls for some skillful relationship building between religious and secular people to make each see a good reason to cooperate with secular cultures they have come to hate.

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One thing is certain: there does exist an entirely different vision of monotheistic sacred space, one which is far less focused on the meaning of sacredness as exclusionary or on triumphalist ownership. That vision is of a space that is so sacred that only human beings who practice profound commitments to justice, and, even more, to compassion, can occupy such space. The texts make it clear here that the land brooks no exceptions based on race or religion. They are actually quite anti-racist on this point.<sup>4</sup>

This means that we have the foundations of a shared vision of this space that in principle could be a blueprint for shared practices of occupation of the land across religious and ethnic lines. Furthermore, if solidified, secular-religious relationships could establish the basis of co-occupation of this space. For example, the human rights negotiations of two states could exist in parallel with religious negotiations of mutual obligations and duties. The fault lines along which

these visions of shared sacred space will have to be expressed are (a) secular-religious, within the same ethnic group; (b) inter-religious and inter-ethnic, across enemy lines; and (c) intra-religious, with varying and competing definitions of religiosity existing within the same group.

The last of these elements is critical and, in some ways, the most thorny, which is exactly why far more progress in Israel has been made to this date in the

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first two categories, but not at all in the third one. The psychological reasons are clear. There is mortal danger of enemies across religious and ethnic lines in Israel, such as between Muslims and Jews, and a long history in this century of mutual injury. One would think that if, as liberal mythology would have us believe, fundamentalists are categorically opposed to tolerance even of

less religious members of their own group, then one would see a double level of intolerance for the fundamentalists of another group. However, this is not what is happening, at least not consistently. In fact, sheikhs and ultra-Orthodox rabbis are communicating with increasing frequency. Yet, at the same time, there is little contact and much more recrimination leveled at non-Orthodox religious Jews by ultra-Orthodox representatives than even against secular Jews.

This is understandable because the ability to coexist is inversely proportional to the challenge to one's existential identity and meaning structure that the "other" poses. While a Muslim fundamentalist poses no threat to the constituency of an ultra-Orthodox rabbi, a Reform rabbi does. Despite the fact that there is such a strong renaissance of ultra-Orthodox culture, there is great existential uncertainty. This expresses itself in some as belligerence and triumphalism and in others as simple fear and boundary building. Conversely, liberal religious Jews are working feverishly and aggressively to gain their place in the future of Israel, a state that is clearly at the center of the Jewish future, at least as things stand now. This liberal religious effort has created a major backlash by the Orthodox, however.

It is plainly apparent that, be it in Eastern Europe, the United States, or the old Zionist kibbutz, the majority of Jews voted with their feet in the last few hundred years against an enclosed civilization of *haredi* Judaism that was so dear to their ancestors.<sup>5</sup> No *haredi* fertility rate can make up for that reality, and it is terrifying those who are trying to hold on to this lifestyle. Thus, the Reform rabbi represents a threat that is far more insidious than that of a sheikh. The main threat of the sheikh is the degree to which he propounds a theocratic/political construct that threatens Jewish safety. But that becomes less and less of a threat to the degree to which the secular Jewish world develops peace arrangements with the "gentiles." As this becomes more and more entrenched in the

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*haredi* consciousness, the existential threat of alternative Judaisms grows much more overtly dangerous. In fact, the real war in Israel—as well as in Europe—for *haredi* Jews has always been the one within Jewish culture not the wars with the gentiles.

It is therefore necessary that we conceive of shared sacred space on many levels and with different kinds of compromises: Jewish-Islamic-Christian compromises, secular-religious compromises, and intra-religious compromises. These compromises involve not only the actual splitting of sacred spaces, but also the search, in a more profound sense, for shared values in terms of the sacred. Of course, secular people will never use the semantics of “sacredness,” but, functionally, there are innumerable cultural phenomena that are sacred to them, such as a free press, higher education, and personal liberty, amongst others. The key is to find common ground in things that people hold the most dear, such as dignity, fairness, and security.

#### SACRED SPACE AND ITS PLACE IN THE PEACE PROCESS

Let us go to the heart of the matter in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and turn to the topic of the Temple Mount. Many blame the current escalation of violence in the Middle East on Ariel Sharon’s visit with hundreds of troops to this holy site. These individuals see this event as the match that lit the Al-Aqsa Intifadah. Many others argue it was the killing of the stone throwers by Israeli riot police on the holy ground the day afterwards. Still others will point to various Palestinian voices that claim that they had long planned an Intifadah and Sharon just gave them the excuse. All of these explanations ignore the deeper reason that the Temple Mount came to embody the struggle, namely the omission of religious viewpoints in a secular diplomatic peace process.

As of January 2001, the major rabbis of Israel were declaring that Israel could not give up sovereignty on the Temple Mount. As *The New York Times* reported: the rabbis had said that “the Temple Mount is the holiest place to the Jewish people,” and that there is “a religious, sovereign, moral and historical right of the Jewish people to this mount” that predates the birth of other religions.<sup>6</sup>

Likewise, the key Islamic leaders have echoed parallel viewpoints. For instance, Sheikh Sabri, the Mufti of Jerusalem, declared, “We cannot permit any non-Muslim sovereignty over the entire area of Al-Aqsa, either above or below ground.”<sup>7</sup>

Meanwhile, the same article in *The New York Times* went on to report that over 100 rabbis had expressed their interest in shared sovereignty. Indeed there were more and more rabbinic voices in the Jewish community for shared sovereignty.<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately, there was no parallel movement in the Islamic community. Furthermore, Sheikh Sabri’s comments were meant specifically to disallow one compromise that Camp David negotiators had proposed. It called for Jewish sov-

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ereignty below ground where the sacred ruins of the Jewish temples lie and Palestinian sovereignty above where the mosques had been built on top of the ruins.

All of these positions of intransigence, reflecting a willingness to perpetuate and provoke the bloodiest stage in recent Israeli-Palestinian relations, resulted from the complete diplomatic, secular neglect of religious communities and religious leaders in the years of the Oslo peace process. The Temple Mount also had become the symbol of every emotion of rage in both communities: rage at indignities, at theft, at murder, and at collective humiliation going back, in some cases, thousands of years.

This was a startling testimony to the consequences of exclusion from peacemaking of those on all sides. This includes the American negotiators who uttered the word “peace” so often and did not make an iota of effort to create parallel religious processes of negotiation, trust-building, acknowledgment of the past, apologies, healing, repentance, or at least some shared understanding of history.

Revealing indications from the negotiators suggest that no one had even been prepared to understand that this Temple Mount actually housed the oldest core of Jewish identity, or that the Noble Sanctuary would become the core issue of rejectionism in the rest of the Arab world. The

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Palestinian negotiators and opinion makers, several of whom this author interviewed, seemed not to have a clue of the Temple Mount’s importance to Jews. Why? It seemed to be both a result of an absence of shared understanding of history and delusional denial, but it was also fed by a willful neglect of this subject for years by third parties, such

as the United States and European nations, and by their secular Israeli counterparts. These Israelis had never faced their own ambivalent identities as Jews—until, of course, it mattered, having emerged at the worst possible moment for peace.

There were so many foolish mistakes on both sides that ignited the Al-Aqsa Intifadah, but this willful disregard of religious and cultural identity remains a major and overlooked factor to this day. In general, the misunderstanding of the deep cultural contest over space, defined in ethno-nationalist terms or in religious terms or both, was a principal deterrent to any peace deal. In a way, the ceaseless building of settlements was designed to scuttle a deal over space and make a separate Palestinian space impossible. That having been said, the settlement building was also a deeply cultural act, responding to the ancient historical Jewish connection to the land, which is far more pronounced on the West Bank, or Judea and Samaria, than it ever was on the coastal plain. The sad ironies and losses abound.

To be fair, the lack of cultural preparedness on the Islamic side for even the notion of shared sovereignty over space sacred to both religions for millennia is an

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essential part of this tragedy. There is no other way to say it. Islamic sources themselves refer repeatedly to this spot as *bait al maqdis*,<sup>9</sup> the Hebrew name used for thousands of years in ancient Judaism for Jewish Temples that are buried beneath this spot. According to Islamic traditions, Mohammed himself referred to it this way and prayed towards it for a considerable time. To deny in the contemporary framework its sacredness to Jews suggests a desperate need to deny history, even Islam's own sacred historical records. It is to deny the need to right historical wrongs. It cannot be separated from the Palestinians' own sense of betrayal and disappointment at not being able to right the historical wrongs perpetrated on them. In this case, sacred history becomes a contest of competing injuries, with truth as its greatest victim.

### NEW APPROACHES TO CONTESTED SPACE

Sharing the Temple Mount was and remains an opportunity to heal history. The building of sacred places on the ruins of other people's sacred spaces as a sign of victory has led to some of the greatest and most irreversable tragedies of religious history, and represents one of the most important ways in which religions are responsible for bloodshed. Sharing is the only possible answer for descendants, for those who have inherited the bad decisions of previous generations of believers.

Some will argue that such sharing was impossible in the hermeneutics of each tradition. It was and is possible, however. Many religious people on both sides felt it was eminently possible, but they were afraid of extremists in their midst. The most important point is that all of this intransigence could have been mollified and attenuated with years of careful relationship building and with leaders who prepared

their people for compromise. Then, the carefully considered, hermeneutically developed religious solutions would have fallen to the earth like ripe apples. But it was not to be.

Let us continue, however, with the concrete ways in which this compromise must ultimately occur. It involves, among other paths that we have discussed, a prioritizing of moral behavior over ownership in the definition of sacredness and in the conceptualization of what it means to occupy sacred space.

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There is no question that each religious community deserves its own independent spaces of sacredness on these holy spots, such as the Temple Mount or the Cave of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs in Hebron.<sup>10</sup> Some spaces on the Temple Mount need to be exclusive, but there can and should be ways in which all of those spaces collectively come under the rubric of universal moral rules. This would bind everyone together ethically and mythically, while simultaneously recognizing separate spaces.

How could we accomplish this feat? One way involves a return to that original home of sacralization in the monotheistic prophets, namely the moral preconditions governing the entrance to sacred ground.<sup>11</sup> In other words, all groups would, for example, participate in aid to the poor and to those who suffer as a part of the occupation of sacred ground. All would agree within that space to respectful and honorable modes of greeting and moral-spiritual etiquette that has

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roots in all three Abrahamic traditions. All would agree to special treatment of animal and plant life in the sacred spaces, rules that all the religions have embedded in them. All would have attitudes of respect for property of the other, especially lost property, as commanded in Exodus as well as the other books of Moses.

Ancient psalms specifically governing entry rights to the Temple Mount once asked the rhetorical question, "Who is allowed to go up to the mountain of God?"<sup>12</sup> Honesty is one of the primary characteristics of such a person, and therefore agreed-upon rules of honesty in speech and practice would also become a part of the sacralization of space. There are also laws governing respectful speech and, last but not least, the respectful treatment of elders.

Parties to the conflict might consider redefining hermeneutically, though in a very conservative fashion, what sacred space is or was. In doing so, the parties may be able to dilute the obsession with sacred space defined exclusively in terms of ownership. This could be a powerful challenge not only to religious civilization, but also to modern secular civilizations in Israel and Palestine, because both cultures are in search of a meaningful future.

Muslims have in their cultural repertoire the notion of *dar al-Islam*, which can be interpreted exclusively in terms of ownership and domination. At the same time, the term can also be defined ethically in terms of agreed upon ethical practices and systems of respect for the religion. Similarly, the Jewish concept of

*Erets ha-Kodesh*, the Holy Land, can be interpreted exclusively in terms of who will own what and who is allowed to be there. In fact, this is the principal bone of contention between the ultra-Orthodox and everyone else, because their concept of Holy Land excludes and disallows the behavior and lifestyle of other Jews. This is the holiness of space defined, in both traditions, in terms of political domination and exclusive rights to the space. However, other possibilities exist.

There are many rules of interpersonal life that will never be agreed upon between the secular and religious communities of the Middle East, and as a result, they cannot form the basis of a social contract. There are, however, many other rules that can be the basis of a social contract. These sacred rules of interpersonal engagement should have their counterparts in secular contracts by which all would agree to abide on sacred ground, with religious obligations having their counterpart in secular formulations of civil rights.

This contractual commitment to sacred space could form the basis for multi-religious and secular-religious treaties on the long-term hopes for and commitment toward the governing of the entire Holy Land region. This would not satisfy those for whom its sacredness is only vouchsafed by exclusive ownership, nor those who want to go further in disallowing any behavior contrary to traditional Jewish law or Islamic *shari'a*. In other words, it will not satisfy those with messianic anticipation of theocracy and absolute control, but it will go a very long way toward creating a new and integrated culture of the region. It will acknowledge the religious parties' claims as at least partially acceptable, give them the dignity of participation in the construction of public, civil society, and bring healing and strength to those who are caught in the middle of these cultural struggles.

This will also require a re-visioning among religious utopian thinkers in all camps for whom exclusive or coercive future visions take precedence over ethics. What I am suggesting involves a vision that will not appeal to everyone, but will include enough religious people from all parties to sideline a violent monotheistic posture. It will offer an alternative view of sacred space that does not require exclusive ownership to be religiously fulfilling.

In very specific places of conflict over ownership, such as the Temple Mount/Noble Sanctuary, this new vision could involve a parallel of secular and sacred peace processes. The religious communities would engage in negotiation on the religious ethical conditions for the occupation of sacred space, while the secular

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governments would work on shared sovereignty in terms of governance and policing. These two realms would intersect in that the religious agreements require a special level of behavioral vigilance by state officials and police from both sides.

Much more would have to be worked on as to the details of how these sacred spaces could be administered, but the contention here is that the very effort to develop a parallel religious process of negotiation over ethical conduct on the grounds of sacred space could inspire a new middle ground in the secular-religious contest that is at the heart of this conflict. It could undercut militaristic fundamentalism by creating a middle space for religious and secular citizens of both states to develop standards of behavior in which rights and duties merge. This could create a new culture of coexistence between religious and secular, as well as between Muslim and Jew. ■

## NOTES

- 1 For example, "It has been told to you, O man, what is good, and what God seeks from you, and that is only to practice justice, to love compassion, and to walk humbly with God," Micah 6:8.
- 2 For example, Deuteronomy 10:18; 24:17; Jeremiah 7:6; Zechariah 7:10.
- 3 Followers of the American Rabbi Meir Kahane are known as right-wing Israeli extremists who propagate expulsion of Arabs from Israel. Two organizations founded by Kahane were declared terrorist organizations by the Israeli Cabinet in March 1994.
- 4 "You shall faithfully observe all My laws and all My regulations, lest the land to which I bring you to settle in spew you out," Leviticus 20:22. Residence on the land is conditional, and unlike common European ethno-nationalist myths, residence is not guaranteed unconditionally by a divine authority, but only by the consequences of human behavior.
- 5 *Haredi* is a general term that refers to ultra-Orthodox Judaism. I fully acknowledge here the thesis that contemporary *haredi* Judaism is not a carbon copy of pre-modern Judaism, but it is sufficiently similar to be a clear counter-example of what most Jews have chosen for themselves in the free modern society.
- 6 Joel Greenberg, "Chief Rabbis Say Israel Must Keep Holy Sight," *The New York Times*, January 5, 2001, A6.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Marc Gopin, "Share Jerusalem or Battle Forever," *Boston Sunday Globe*, September 24, 2000, F2.
- 9 See Sahih Bukhari, Book 2, Number 39, "Narrated by Al-Bara' (bin 'Azib): When the Prophet came to Medina, he stayed first with his grandfathers or maternal uncles from Ansar. He offered his prayers facing Baitul-Maqdis (Jerusalem) for sixteen or seventeen months, but he wished that he could pray facing the Ka'ba (at Mecca)." See also Book 4, Number 147. Jerusalem is sometimes referred to as Ilya, the ancient Roman name, and sometimes as Bait al-Maqdis, depending on the context. Most important is that sometimes it is referred to both as Temple and Bait Maqdis. See Sahih Muslim, Book 1, Number 0309, "It is narrated on the authority of Anas b. Malik that the Messenger of Allah (may peace be upon him) said: I was brought al-Buraq Who is an animal white and long, larger than a donkey but smaller than a mule, who would place his hoof a distance equal to the range of vision. I mounted it and came to the Temple (Bait Maqdis in Jerusalem), then tethered it to the ring used by the prophets. I entered the mosque and prayed two rak'ahs in it, and then came out and Gabriel brought me a vessel of wine and a vessel of milk. I chose the milk, and Gabriel said: You have chosen the natural thing. Then he took me to heaven." The ancient Jewish word for the two temples, one destroyed in 586 BCE and the second destroyed in 70 CE, is bet ha-miqdash, which is the exact cognate of the term used in the *hadith*. It means "the house of holiness," or "the sanctified house." There is no doubt that Mohammed, at least according to the classical Islamic sources, made a clear connection between this sacred spot and its Jewish spiritual origins. This is one more example of how the politicization of religion, or the modern fundamentalist turn in religion, is only sometimes a return to original, intolerant sources. Often it is a distortion of classical sources for contemporary political agendas.
- 10 The latter, by the way, does not require Jewish residence in Hebron, though it would be wonderful and restorative if the original Jewish community, destroyed by the 1929 riots, were welcomed back as honored guests, as opposed to the belligerent force of radicals there now. The key to inter-religious peace ultimately must be access and respect, not domination by one party or the other. Similarly, the impossibility of all

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Palestinian refugees returning to Israel is evident to both sides. It would be a wonderful opportunity for bilateral healing if on the same day that the Hebron Palestinian community made gestures to the survivors of the 1929 Jewish community that a Jewish community inside Israel welcomed back the survivors of original residents of a nearby Palestinian community. It would be especially effective if it were accompanied by gestures at the Cave of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs, which was in parallel to a rededication of a mosque inside Israel. These are not pipe dreams. They do require long periods of cultivation, extensive financial support so that talented people can work on this exclusively, and support from leaders who at least get out of the way of these developing relationships.

- 11 Psalm 15, for example. Clearly this would involve building moral sources and precedents from all the Abrahamic traditions, but, in terms of the Temple Mount, Judaism and Islam. In Islam, there are laws governing sacred spaces as well. See, for example, Sahih Muslim Book 7: Kitab al-hajj, Numbers 3153-3154, which involve the declaration of Mecca and Medina as sacred and the prohibition against cutting trees there or killing the animals.

12 Psalm 15:1.

