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Jamiatul Ulama

south africa

COUNCIL OF MUSLIM THEOLOGIANS
Established in 1923 as Jamiatul Ulama Transvaal
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Assalaamu 'Alaikum!

Re: #LoveAqsa | 6th-12th March 2021

Baitul Maqdas has a special place in the hearts of Muslims. Its significance as the third Noble Sanctuary of Islam and a destination for pilgrimage keeps us connected to the Holy City. According to traditions, The Miraj (Ascension of the Prophet SAW) took place at the site of Masjid al Aqsa.

Aqsa Week (6th – 12th March 2021) has been set aside to take place before the end of this month of Rajab, in order to refresh and revive our love and attachment to the blessed land of Masjid al Aqsa and its precincts.

The Jamiatul Ulama South Africa is encouraging all Muslims to mark **Aqsa Week** through such activities as, but not limited to the following:

- A Friday Jumuah sermon by imams and khateebis in masaajid
- A lecture programme for online platforms and at appropriate gatherings
- Setting aside time with family and friends to talk about Masjid al Aqsa
- Engaging audiences on media channels, social and broadcast
- A special multimedia presentation for learners in classrooms and online


We would like to know what such events you will be able to hold, in your masjid, locality, maktab, school, campus and at other venues. Please share with us details of your programme, in-sha-Allah.

Meanwhile, we hereby draw your attention to the following resources:

- Friends of Al Aqsa's resource page has information and other resources that can be used in the various events for marking **Aqsa Week**. (<https://www.foa.org.uk/campaign/loveaqsa/>)
- Notes of a lecture entitled *Palestine in Islamic Thought*. It has been attached herewith. Kindly make it a basis of a Jumuah sermon or presentation.

Wassalaam.

Yours sincerely,
for Jamiatul Ulama South Africa


E.I. Bham (Moulana)
Secretary General

PALESTINE IN ISLAMIC THOUGHT

*Recommended Common Jumu'ah Lecture
Prepared by the Jamiatul Ulama South Africa*

Palestine in general, and Jerusalem and Al-Aqsa Masjid have always been prominent in Islamic thought throughout its history. This has been due to several factors and reasons.

The first reason: Its Sacredness and Sanctity in Islamic Teachings

Its sanctity is matched only by Makkah and Madinah. In the Qur'ān there are many verses implying that the Land of Palestine, the city of Jerusalem, the entire environs are set apart as blessed, as they have received special divine blessings. The land around Masjid Al-Aqsa is referred to 70 times as the blessed land in the Qur'ān amongst which are the following verses:

- “Glory be to the One who took His Slave for a journey by night from the Sacred Mosque to the Furthest Mosque, whose precincts We have blessed – in order that We might show him some of Our Signs: He is the One Who hears and sees (all things).” (Sūrah Bani Isra’īl or Surat al-Isra’, 17:1) Thus, Ibn Abbās *Radhi-Allāhu ‘anhu* states that “whose precincts we have blessed” refers to Palestine and Jordan.
- [Mūsa said:] “O my people! Enter the holy land which God has assigned you, and turn not back ignominiously, for then you will be overthrown, to your own ruin.” (Sūrah al-Maidah, 5:23) The ‘holy land which Allāh has assigned you’ is thus clearly the land of Palestine. Ibn Abbās, however, takes it more restrictively as referring to Jerusalem and the surrounding area.
- “By the fig and the olive, and the Mount of Sinai, and this secure city. We have indeed created man in the best of moulds.” (Sūrah at-Tīn, 95:1-4) Qatadah interprets the fig and the olive as a figurative expression for Jerusalem. There seems to be little doubt that the ‘City of Security’ is Makkah. Mount Sinai is also a place, the place where the *Tawrah* was given to Mūsa *Alayhis-Salām*. This might suggest that the opening elements of the adjuration also should refer to a place or places where revelation was given, i.e. Jerusalem
- “We made the son of Maryam and his mother a Sign: We gave them both shelter on high ground, affording rest and security and furnished with springs.” (Sūrah al-Mu’minūn, 23:50) In the parallel passage in Sūrah Maryam, 19:22, the ‘high ground’ [*rabwah*] is called ‘a remote place’. Ad-Dahhak and Qatadah both maintain that it is al Quds.
- The niche [*mihrab*] of Zakariyya mentioned in the Qur’ān (Chapter 3, Verse 37) is also in Jerusalem.
- The place where Hadrat Maryam was devoted to the service of Allāh by her parents as per their dedication at the time of her conception was Masjid Al-Aqsa in Jerusalem. (Sūrah al-Imran, 3:5 and Sūrah Maryam 19:16)

These are just a few examples amongst many of the sacredness of Palestine in the Qur’ān.

Ahādith

- Virtues of praying in Masjid Al Aqsa are exalted. Up to 500 times more virtuous than any Masājid other than Baitullah and Masjid Nabawi *Sallallāhu ‘alayhi wasallam* (Hadith: Abū Darda; Al Bukharī). Also it is a Masjid where specific travel could be made to.
- Second Masjid to be established on Earth. (Hadīth: Abū Dhar -Sahīh Muslim)
- He who performs Hajj and Umrah from Masjid Al-Aqsa, Allāh will forgive his past minor sins. (Mishqāt)



- It is the first Qiblah of Muslims.
- The incident of Mir'aj has further linked Masjid al Aqsa to the hearts and minds of Muslims
- Maimunah bint Sa'd *Radhi-Allâhu 'anha* asked the Prophet *Sallallâhu 'alayhi wasallam*, 'Tell us about Bait al-Maqdis.' He said, 'It is the land of gathering and resurrection. Go there and offer prayer. Your prayer will be considered as a thousand prayers.' She asked, 'What if we cannot go there, or if there is nothing to carry us there?' He said, 'You should send some oil as a gift for its lamps, for whoever offers a gift to it will have the reward of offering prayer there.' (Abū Dawūd)

Thus due to these teachings throughout Islamic History, there was a profound attachment to this holy land starting from the time 'Umār *Radhi-Allâhu 'anhu* when he rode triumphantly into Al-Quds. He entered Jerusalem on foot without bloodshed and massacre.

It is related that 'Umār *Radhi-Allâhu 'anhu* asked Sophronius, the city patriarch, to take him to the sanctuary of David as soon as he was through writing the terms of surrender. They were joined by four thousand Companions of the Prophet *Radhi-Allâhu 'anhum*.

When they reached the area of the Noble Sanctuary they found it covered in rubbish. 'Umār *Radhi-Allâhu 'anhu* proceeded to the west of the sanctuary and unfurled his cloak. He filled it with debris. Those with him did likewise. They disposed of it and returned again and again, until the whole area where Al-Aqsa Mosque now stands was cleared. The rock was uncovered and the ground purified. A huge timber Masjid which held three thousand worshipers was erected on this site, the site of the present day Al-Aqsa Mosque.

The entire area of the Haram ash-Sharif, the Noble Sanctuary, included more than 35 acres. The great rock is the site of the ascension of the Prophet *Sallallâhu 'alayhi wasallam* to heaven on the Night Journey and the direction of the first *Qiblah*. It lays in the centre.

Fifty years later, near the end of the 7th century, it was given to the Umayyad *Khalifa*, Abdul Malik ibn Marwan, to construct one of the world's most beautiful and enduring shrines over the rock itself. Highlighting the skyline of Jerusalem, and the memories of all those who visit the sanctuary. The Dome of the Rock is a tribute to the Muslims' love and respect for this site. In the later years, to underline this love and respect, Suleiman the Magnificent consolidated his domain into the greatest world power of the 16th century. Drawing on his tremendous resources, he restored and renewed all of Jerusalem, building walls, gates, towers, and aqueducts.

His most remembered gift to Jerusalem, however, was the breathtakingly beautiful tile work commissioned for the exterior of the Dome of the Rock. With the incomparable skills of Persia's master ceramists, 40,000 tiles were fired and put into place, crowned by the inscription of *Sūratul Yā-Sīn* at the top. The brilliant application of exquisite aesthetics to celebrate the message of God has made the Dome of the Rock a world landmark in sacred architecture.

The Noble Sanctuary due to the above facts, became a great centre of learning; scholars came from all over the world to worship at Al-Aqsa and to study and teach within its precincts.

Other Points of Distinction

- After 'Umār ibn Khatab *Raḍhi-Allāhu 'anhu* signed an agreement, he refused to distribute the land amongst the Muslim soldiers and declared it an Islamic endowment [*waqf*] for the benefit of future generations. *Waqf*, by definition, is a property that belongs to Allāh until the Day of Qiyyāmah. Islamic literature is filled with references to Palestine as an Islāmic trust or endowment.
- Approximately four thousand sahabah are buried in this sacred land.
- Imām Ghazālī wrote his *Ihya Ulūm-Dīn* in the precincts of Masjid Al Aqsa. Imām Shafī, the famous Muslim jurist hails from Gaza in Palestine.
- This attachment did not diminish even in times of ease and adversity. When the crusaders entered Al-Quds, with the accompanying bloodshed that characterized their invasion, it did not dim people's attachment to the Holy Land. Nurudīn, the able and righteous ruler of Aleppo at such a juncture, commissioned master craftsmen to build an extraordinary *mimbar* made from cedarwood which he resolved to install in Al-Aqsa the day the crusaders were expelled from Al-Quds and forty years after it was commissioned, it was put in place. On June 21, 1969, an Australian born terrorist, Dennis Michael Nohan, set this unique *mihrab* on fire, though it was later partially restored.

The second reason: Why Palestine will be foremost in Islamic thought is that it is the Land of the Prophets [ambiyā]

- It is an article of Islāmic faith to respect all the Prophets. (Qur'ānic)
- Our faith has restored to these messengers their dignity and integrity, and refuted the outrageous accusations against many of them. The Qur'ān sympathetically relates the incident of Mūsa *Alayhis-Salām* and Maryam *Alayhas-Salām* and her immaculate birth of Īsa *Alayhis-Salām*.
- Muslims are proud to call their children with the names of these Prophets.
- Because of our respect for these Prophets, and the fact that they were associated with Al Quds, and its surroundings, every inch has become an object of reverence.
- It was here where these personalities lived, received revelation [*wahy*] and on its earth they walked. Its stones witnessed their experience, persecution and prayers. Thus, Safiyya *Radiallāhu anha*, after visiting Masjidul Aqsa, went to the Mount of Olives remarking, "This is the place where Īsa *Alayhis-Salām* was taken up into the Heaven." (Tafsīr Fathul Aziz)
- One of the reasons why Muslims believe that they are the most appropriate custodians of the land as they revere all the Prophets and personalities of the previous religions. The same cannot be said of other faith groups.

Due to this fact, Al-Quds has been an object of pilgrimage for Muslims throughout history and the flow of pilgrims from other religions remained unhindered during Muslim rule, a fact borne out by history. To illustrate this point, On entering Jerusalem in 1517, the Ottoman Sultan Selim was entrusted with the keys to Al-Aqsa and the Dome of the Rock. A delegation of Christian clerics presented him with a scroll containing the original covenant of Umar, guaranteeing them rights over the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and other Christian Holy places. Selim pressed them to his face and kissed them, confirming his intention to honor Umar's word.

The Description of Palestine

Al Muqaddasi, the 10th century scholar and writer from Jerusalem had written about his travels thus:

This Province is of glorious renown, the Land of Prophets! It is the gathering of the righteous. Here dwelt the Saints, and here is the First *Qibla*; also the Place of Resurrection, and of the Night Journey. For this reason is it called the Holy Land. Its watch-posts are strong, its frontiers are magnificent, and its mountains noble. Thither went **Abraham** [Ibrahim] as a pilgrim, and there is his tomb. This is the Land of **Job** [Ayyub], and there is his well; in Jerusalem is the oratory of **David** [Dawūd] and his gate; here are the wonders of **Solomon** [Sulaiman] and his cities; the tomb of **Isaac** [Ishāq], and that of his mother; the birth-place of the Messiah and his cradle. So likewise the village of **Saul** [Talūt] and his river; the place of the slaying of **Goliath** [Jalūt] and his rampart; **Jeremiah's** [Aramaya] cistern and his prison; the place of prayer of **Uriah** and his house; the dome of **Muhammad** and his gate; the rock of **Moses** [Mūsa], and the hill of **Jesus** [Īsa], the oratory of **Zacharias** [Zakariyya], and the waters of the baptism of **John** [Yahya]; the place of martyrdom of the prophets, and the villages of Job. And, too, here are **Jacob's** [Yakūb] stations, and the Further Mosque; the Mount of Olives, and the city of Acre; the place of martyrdom of **Siddiqa**, and the grave of **Moses** [Mūsa]; the resting-place of **Abraham** and his tomb; the city of **Ascalon** [Askalan], and the spring of **Siloam**; the home of **Luqman** the Sage, and the valley of **Kin'an**; the cities of **Lot**, and the Place of the Gardens; **Omar's** Mosque, and **'Ūthmān's** Almshouse [*Baitul Ma'*].

The third reason: why Palestine is and will be foremost in Islamic thought is that Muslims believe that life and history is moving purposefully towards a climax known as the Day of Judgment.

Towards this, the *Sharī'ah* has given us signs which foretell the hour and the climax. A great deal of these signs will centre on the precincts of Palestine:

- Maimunah bin Sād *Radiallāhu anha* asked: "O Prophet of Allāh! Tell us about Baitul Maqdas to which he replied, 'It is the land of gathering and resurrection.'" (Abū Dawūd)
- Amongst the first of the major signs of Qiyāmah will be the appearance of Imām Mahdi. He will proclaim his mission in the land of Palestine, Al-Quds.
- A major sign of Qiyāmah will be the appearance of Dajjal [The Antichrist] when no place will be safe from his domination except the Holy Cities of Makkah, Madinah and some narrations also relate to Al-Quds. (Ahmed, Hākim)
- In pursuit of his control over the universe, Dajjal will surround the Muslims, who will take refuge on a Hill in Jerusalem (Ibn Majah). The compilations of Ahmed and Hākim go on to specify the mountain as that of Dukhan.
- Īsa *Alayhis-Salām* will descend to the Earth as one of the major signs of the end of the time. According to Muslim tradition, he will initially appear in Damascus and then make his way to Baitul Muqaddas (Jerusalem) to assist the Muslims who will be taking refuge from Dajjal. (Muslim, Tibrani, Ibn Asakir)
- Īsa *Alayhis-Salām* would then kill Dajjal in the town of Lud, probably ancient Lyddia (modern day Lud near Jaffa. (Tel-Aviv)
- The Call for the Day of Judgment will also take place from Jerusalem. "Listen for the day when the caller will call out from a place quite near..." (Sūrah Qaf, 50:41) Ibn Kathīr commented: "Quite near means the Rock of Baitul Muqaddas."

Thus due to these factors, the sanctity of Palestine will remain in our mind, irrespective of attempts to wipe it from the memories of the Muslims.