

شهداء بالقسط

**“WITNESSES FOR FAIR PLAY” REPAIRING HISTORICAL
MEMORY—THE CASE OF JERUSALEM**

*Muhammad Suhayl ‘Umar**

The Qur’ān is first a recited book.¹ The Qur’ān was recited to the Prophet by the Archangel Gabriel. The Prophet memorized it and then recited it to his followers, who also memorized it. Beyond the Qur’ān, as the years and centuries passed, the living memory of Muhammad and his Sunnah gradually weakened, and it became more and more necessary to record the details of his life and practice so that they would not be lost. At the same time, the areas within which Islam became established continued to go through the vicissitudes that mark human existence— the differences of opinion, the struggles for power, the loves and hates, the natural and man-made catastrophes. An Islamic reflection on memory therefore begins with the dual dimensions of memory – on the one hand, the centrality of memory as a means to gaining wisdom and on the other, the ways in which memory is recast and reshaped, in light of and in relation to historical processes. Herein lies a profound tension. On the one hand, the thrust of Islamic tradition is to capture memory faithfully, and it assumes such capturing is possible; on the other hand, we must recognize that memory itself has undergone changes in the course of history, complicating what has been learned and memorized.

This tension may be described also as the quest for truthful memory. If faithful memory is endangered by the vicissitudes of history, there is at the same time also a self-correcting potential for recovering authentic historical memory. The quest for faithful or truthful memory is a crucial component of the application of memory in a contemporary interreligious context. All too readily, truthful memory is sacrificed in the name of circumstances exterior to itself. It is the duty of the sages and scholars to

* *Former Director, Iqbal Academy Pakistan, Lahore*

uncover truthful memory, thereby upholding fundamental spiritual truths of the tradition.

The present paper explores this dynamic as they play out in relation to a specific historical situation between Islam and Judaism, the case of the Furthest Mosque (*Al-Aqsā Mosque*) which, *mutatis mutandis*, applies to Jerusalem and it is suggested that we have the possibility to recover truthful memory and that there is a religious mandate to engage in such recovery, regardless of how unpopular it is under given political circumstances. Although the paper is written from my own Muslim context, that of Pakistan, and draws heavily on conversations and debates that took place within the Pakistani institutions of religious education and public system, it is extremely relevant to the overall “Palestinian Problem” and the case of the Furthest Mosque for two important reasons. Firstly, because it is a typical case of sacrificing truthful memory in the name of circumstances exterior to itself, and, secondly, the position taken by the *Muslim Endowment Committee of Jerusalem* on the question of the rights of custodianship /relationship of the Jews *vis a vis* the Jewish Relics/sites in Jerusalemⁱⁱ merely echoes the (revised) religious opinions forged by the Indian religious scholarship in the early twentieth century and is no more than a replication of this modified untruthful memory and its application to the political arena. It also provides us with a testimony of how issues of memory and truth worked out within one Muslim framework are of relevance to the broader Muslim community and to the interfaith community at large. Moreover, the case study presented here can teach us lessons about one way of tackling the challenges of memory and how it complicates interfaith relations. It also holds out the hope of recovery of truthful memory, thereby sending a message of hope to interfaith relations as such, suggesting that truth can prevail at the end of the day. Purification or modifications of memory have the potential for bringing about healing between faith traditions. While the Pakistani context did not allow for a widespread healing, given the absence of a Jewish community in Pakistan, it does offer hope that recovery of truthful historical memory has a considerable potential for improving Jewish-Muslim relations since the conceptual problems have often spilled over into situations of violence and extend to situations that involve national identity that is fed by religious identity. It may also be seen as an instance of collective memories of different communities moving away from the norm of “truthfulness” and objectivity of memory and becoming enwrapped in modified and

misplaced memories that have affected discernment, influenced judgments and ultimately led to incorrect remembering.

In short, incorrect remembering has resulted in acting unjustly or adopting certain positions that are not warranted or justified by Scripture and by the overall perspective of the tradition. The debate provides an occasion for soul searching, reconsidering and reframing behaviour in the light of the Qur'ānic injunctions that emphatically remind the Muslim community to be truthful and impartial and to uphold justice even in cases where a group or collectivity had wronged it or acted towards it in an unjust manner: *"You who believe, be unwavering towards God, as witnesses for fair play, and do not let ill-will toward any folk incriminate you so that you swerve from dealing justly. Be just: that is nearer to God-wariness; and heed God [Alone]. God is informed about anything you do"*ⁱⁱⁱ According to this Qur'ānic perspective, if an individual or a collectivity allows itself to be overwhelmed by memories that had been modified in an incorrect or untruthful way it would not be fulfilling its moral obligations and the spiritual duty enjoined by the Scripture. In the case described below– that of the Temple Mount within the matrix of relations between Jews and Muslims– the idea of moral and religious responsibility was invoked and eschatological vision played a major part to help reframe these memories.

AL-AQSĀ MOSQUE, JEWS AND THE MUSLIM COMMUNITY

Perspective & Background

With regard to the religions that are, as it were, rooted in Abraham, the city of Jerusalem is of immense importance to all three of them, to each in its own particular way. A brief review of the history (see [Annex– B](#)) of the Furthest Mosque (*Al-Aqsā Mosque*) reveals that both the Jewish and Muslim Communities have a feeling of religious and historical relationship to the Temple Mount and the holy places of Jerusalem. The nature of the relationship and its significance for the respective houses of faith are, however, different. For the Jews, this place of worship is their centre and the site of their ritual orientation (*qiblah*)^{iv} and a reminder of their political power and past worldly glory. They face towards it for prayers and supplication and they have harboured the hope to revive the religious rites of worship in this precinct for centuries. Muslim respect and relationship to this place is also extraordinary. For Muslims it is one of the most important relics of their sacred history and the land of a large number

of prophets of Israel. They honoured and rehabilitated this place of worship when it had become derelict as a result of the mutual conflicts of the Jews and Christians and they take pride in the service that they have rendered to the holy land over the centuries. The Muslim mind looks at this service as a blessed and laudable spiritual activity according to its religious, ethical and intellectual standards.

This accepted and shared backdrop of historical and religious relationship and reverence to the same site also leads to what are seemingly conflicting claims of both the Muslim and Jewish houses of faith with regard to the Temple Mount. The question has several dimensions, legal, religious, historical, ethical and ultimately involves a reading of divine providence and its charge. From the perspective of the Qur’ān and the Sunnah, it is the ethical, spiritual and eschatological point of view that must be given precedence in cases of dispute. Nevertheless, in the wake of the emergence of the Palestinian problem, Muslim scholarship of the Indian subcontinent has undergone a conceptual shift, related to political positions taken by the Arab world. The core question on which this conceptual shift took place could be summarised as follows: Is it a demand of the Islamic Sharī‘ah, a requirement of the Islamic law, that the Muslims should reject the Jewish claims of affiliation, feeling of relationship to and possibility of custodianship in relation to the Temple Mount? Alternatively, is the present situation merely an outcome of the workings of history and a consequence of contingent events that had created a situation in which the Muslim community had to shoulder the responsibility of the custodianship of the holy land and of looking after the places of worship situated there? In the Indian subcontinent a change of perspective occurred as a result of the Israeli-Arab conflict. The former view i.e. “a requirement of the Islamic Sharī‘ah” dominated over the latter, which until then used to be the normative view throughout centuries and which upheld that the custodianship of the holy land by the Muslim Community, while being an honour of the highest order, was, nevertheless, a historical contingency and was not a result of a religious mandate that was carried out as a fulfilment of a Divine command.

This conceptual shift emerged in the works of four leading religious authorities, who were outstanding scholars of their age— Amīn Ahsan Islāhī,^v Sayyid Sulaymān Nadawī,^{vi} Abū al-A‘lā Mawdūdī^{vii} and Qāri Muhammad Tayyib.^{viii} Unprecedented in the entire history of Muslim

scholarship on the issue, these views gradually dislodged the earlier views of Muslim scholarship about the holy land. The conceptual and doctrinal position that was an outcome of these formulations modified the collective memory to such an extent that it became the *de facto* standard of the Muslim narrative. According to this position, the Muslims had not become the custodians and caretakers of the holy land as a result of historical circumstances and political conditions of the times. Rather, it was divinely ordained that the right of custodianship of the two sacred Tabernacles of God should be taken away from both the lines of the descendants of Abraham– the Children of Israel and the Children of Ishmael– for their deviation from the Covenant in the case of the former and for falling into idolatry in the case of the latter. As a result, at a certain phase of world history, the right of custodianship was conferred on the Muslim Community by a regular injunction of the Islamic Shari‘ah which, as a consequence, abrogated the rights of custodianship held earlier by the Children of Israel.

This altered memory prevailed for almost 80 years. However, over the last decade a widespread, soul searching debate emerged in the religious and political circles of Pakistan, with ramifications in the larger areas of Urdu speaking/reading regions of Muslim lands,^{ix} which challenged this religious/doctrinal and intellectual/academic position and argued in favour of revisiting the issue in relation to the primary Islamic sources and the earlier practice of the Muslim community. Broadly entitled the “*Al-Aqsā Mosque, Jews and the Muslim Community*”,^x this debate is a characteristic example of an attempt to modify/correct collective memories of a community that had moved away from the norm of “truthfulness” and objectivity. Different, often opposing, Schools of thought participated in the debate.^{xi}

The doctrinal, historical and circumstantial arguments that provided the intellectual and religious underpinnings for the conceptual shift mentioned above are detailed in Annex C. A sampling of the debate is provided later in these pages.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The region where Israel and Palestine are presently located is regarded as the holy land by both of the communities. A Large number of the prophets belonged to this area. *Al-Aqsā Mosque*, which is historically related to a

large number of prophets of Israel, is also situated in the region. The issue of the custodianship or right of possession of *Al-Aqsā Mosque* vis a vis the Temple Mount is the bone of contention between the Jews and Muslims. The Jews claim that two Temples stood on this site. The first Temple was built under the direction of King Solomon in 961 B.C.E and was destroyed in 586 B.C.E. by the armies of Babylon. The Second Temple was built under the direction of Ezra in 520 B.C.E on the same site and was destroyed in 70 C.E. by the legions of Rome. Despite the fact that there are internal differences among Jewish denominations and groups on the details, in principle, it is generally agreed that the site of the two Temples remains a place of great holiness and the reclamation and rebuilding of the Temple in the Messianic Era is an eschatological hope and essential principle of Jewish belief. For Jews, the Temple is a place for sacred service of God that bestows blessing on all humanity. While Jews do not wish to construct the temple, it is an important component of their eschatological vision. But even if building the Third Temple is part of an eschatological hope only, its memory is, nevertheless, central to Jews. They wish to uphold its memory because it touches on core dimensions of identity and holiness, as these are channeled through memory.

The Arab position, that emerged in the wake of the Palestinian problem starting in the third decade of the 20th century, eventually led to the assertion that the holy precinct which they call "*Al-Haram al-Sharif*" (the Noble Holy precinct)^{xiii} has nothing to do with the Temples which Prophets Solomon and Ezra had built. This holy precinct has been in the possession of the Muslim community for centuries and on the basis of this historical continuity the *Muslim Endowment Committee of Jerusalem* has taken the position that the Jews have no right whatsoever on any part of the precinct and that to give them a right of possession or custodianship over a portion of the precinct would go against the rulings of the Islamic law. The grand mufti of Palestine 'Ikrama Sabri formulated this position in the following words: "*all the buildings surrounding the Al-Aqsā Mosque have the status of an Islamic endowment. The doors, windows and passages of these buildings directly open out unto the Al-Aqsā Mosque and with regards to sanctity and holiness these carry the same status which is of the Al-Aqsā Mosque. Therefore according to the Islamic law, taking away any of these buildings and turning it into a place of worship of the Jews is an impossibility.*" (<http://www.la.utexas.edu/>). This is what we had referred to earlier as "*no more than a replication of [an]untruthful memory and its*

application to the political arena." The root of the conflict lies in this extremist standpoint of the *Muslim Endowment Committee* and it is necessary to revisit this interpretation. It is a requirement not only of the basic Islamic texts of the Qur'ān and the Sunnah but it is strongly supported by the attitude and practice that the Muslim community, while being in possession of the precinct of the Temple Mount, had adopted over the past centuries with regard to the construction of the Temple. The debate mentioned above focused on revisiting the whole issue with a view to find out if the Muslim position had been influenced by untruthful memories and distorted images of the religious Other. As a secondary outcome, it attempted to suggest a practical solution as well^{xiii} (see [Annex A](#)).

SALIENT GLIMPSES OF THE DEBATE

God never addresses the same message to two or more recipients of divergent character. Therefore, God's Word enters history differently, according to Divine Wisdom, in relation to different receptacles. According to the Islamic lights, God sent His prophets and Messengers to all human collectivities individually up to the Abrahamic age.^{xiv} But after the times of Abraham, the Divine scheme chose Abraham and his descendants as the vehicles for the divine message, to become a dazzling witness of the divine message in themselves and to propagate the message to other nations of the world. This responsibility of the children of the Abraham was divided into phases. The descendants of the Prophet Jacob were selected for undertaking the responsibility in the first phase, they were given the holy land, a law in the form of the Torah, a continuous chain of prophet hood, as well as worldly glory and political power. The Temple of Solomon was built in Jerusalem which became the place of their orientation and a centre of the religious and spiritual sentiments. The children of Israel, during the different periods of their history, would at times rise to the demands of their responsibility, while at others they fell short of it and went against the Covenant. After having been tested for a long time, when the children of Israel collectively relegated themselves, religiously and ethically, to such a low state that no hope was left, they were removed from their responsibility with the arrival of the Prophet Jesus. Part of that responsibility was then devolved on the other branch of the children of Abraham, the children of Ishmael, where prophethood had been dormant for a long time.

The children of Ishmael were commanded by the Lord to inhabit the Arabian Peninsula, were given the essential doctrines, rituals and code of worship of the house of Abraham, and were made the custodians of the outlying Tabernacle of God in Mecca. For most of their history the children of Ishmael were faithful to their original teachings but decline and deviation set in and, gradually, idolatry crept into their metaphysical concepts, rites and rituals and social activities. Finally, six centuries after Prophet Jesus, the last prophet of the house of Abraham, the prophet of Islam, Muhammad, restored the Abrahamic faith in its pristine purity in Arabia and deposed the children of Ishmael from the custodianship of the House of God, the Tabernacle of Ka‘bah at Mecca.

This apparent similarity that existed between the two lines of descent of the children of Abraham was the basis on which the 20th century Indian scholars of Islam mentioned earlier had built their argument for the abrogation of the rights of custodianship of the children of Israel for the holy land and for the sacred places of Jerusalem.

To the extent of our knowledge, it was the first time in Muslim intellectual history that such a view was expressed. Throughout history, Islamic scholarship had seen this change as a punishment for going against the Covenant that could be reverted if the children of Israel repented and amended their ways.^{xv} In Islamic terminology it was an “Engendering Command or Providential Command (*amrtakwīnī*),^{xvi} the way God entered history, and not a “Law-giving Command” (*amrtashrī‘ī*). The counter argument that emerged during the debate contested this view on two counts: Firstly this new discourse had obliterated the time honoured, standard distinction^{xvii} between the two domains of *tashrī‘* (Divine Command/Law) and *takwīn* (the way Providence works in history). Secondly, the removal of the children of Israel from the custodianship of the Temple belonged to the category of a Providential Command that cannot be made a basis for a religious ruling. This second point was of primary importance since the Qur’ān had categorically established this distinction with regard to the prophetic mission of Muhammad and had accorded completely different status to the two places of worship in this respect. Moreover the practical position that the Prophet of Islam had taken *vis a vis* these two places of worship was also totally distinct.

The counter argument further points out that there are three aspects of the Law-giving Command for the banishment of the children of Ishmael that need to be kept in view with regard to the distinction established by the Qur'ān between "The Inviolable Mosque" at Makkah and the *Al-Aqsā Mosque*.

- The rank and significance of the House of God, the Ka'bah, for the house of Abraham.
- The nature of the deviation of the children of Israel from the creed of Abraham that was fundamentally different from that of the children of Ishmael.
- The punishment ordained by God for the children of Ishmael for their idolatry.

A secondary claim that has been advanced by Sayyid Sulaymān Nadawī in this regard pertained to the promise that had been mentioned in Deuteronomy^{xviii} and argued that after the advent of Islam, this promise was made conditional upon the acceptance of Islam by the Jews.^{xix} The counter statement of the debate pointed out the futility of the argument by saying that if according to the Islamic law the Jews were allowed to exist as a religious community and to practice their religion with freedom, and if their religious places and rites of worship were respected and protected by the law, it was pointless to divest them from their site of orientation! Furthermore, the Prophet of Islam had made his conclusive and decisive argument against the Jews of the Arabian Peninsula only who were merely a small part of the children of Israel spread in different parts of the world. It would have been completely unjustified to apply the same decision to the entire Jewish community settled in Asia, Africa and various parts of Europe who might not have even heard of the advent of Islam!

The upshot of argument is that parallels could not be drawn and the same conclusions cannot be applied to the Jews and the idolatrous Arabs on the one hand and "The Inviolable Mosque" and the *Al-Aqsā Mosque* on the other. That would be based on a false assumption that both communities were deposed of their status and responsibility for the same reasons. The children of Ishmael were banished from "The Inviolable Mosque" because the Lord had declared this house of worship to be a universal centre of the religion of Abraham and the idolatrous Arabs had fallen away from the essential message of the Unity of God by adopting *shirk* (associating with

God/idolatry) as their religion. Therefore, by every religious and ethical principle, they forfeited their right to be the custodians of the house. Moreover, once the Prophet of Islam had given his decree against them through a revelation from God that they had no right to exist as a community anymore, there was no question of having any kind of relationship with the Ka'bah, the House of God at Makkah. None of these factors existed in the case of the Jews and the *Al-Aqsā Mosque*. Therefore the same religious ruling cannot be applied to them.

ARGUMENTS OF A PARTIAL AND SECONDARY NATURE (A FEW EXAMPLES)

1– GENERALIZATION OF THE PROHIBITION FOR THE IDOLATROUS ARABS TO BE THE CARE TAKERS OF THE HOUSES OF GOD.

An argument to that effect has been made by some of the scholars^{xx} on the basis of verses 17 and 18 of the Surah 9 of the Qur'ān^{xxi} which prohibit the idolaters to take care of the houses of God by generalizing the command given with regard to the polytheistic Arabs and claiming that the *Al-Aqsā Mosque* can no longer have any relation to a group that has deviated from the divine message. The counter argument points out that it was a context specific command pertaining to the idolatrous Arabs which cannot be universalized in light of the evidence presented from the Qur'ānic narrative.

2– PARALLEL DRAWN WITH THE IDOLATERS.

An argument has also been advanced that even though the verses are directly and essentially related to the idolaters, using the principle of analogical reasoning (*qiyās*) the ruling could be derived from these verses with regard to the abrogation of the right of custodianship of the Jews. The counter argument points out that each and every stage of the banishment of the the idolatrous Arabs was completed in the light of the Divine Revelation and no step was taken by the Muslim community on its own discretion. The Qur'ānic narrative gives all the details and categorically commands the Muslims with regard to the rulings that pertain to the idolaters but the same narrative is completely silent on the issue of custodianship or of the ongoing relationship of the Jews with the Temple. Therefore no valid parallel drawn can be drawn with the idolaters.

3– ARGUMENT FROM THE NOCTURNAL JOURNEY (*ISRĀ*) OF THE PROPHET.

One of the most important events in the life of the Prophet of Islam is the Nocturnal Journey that he had miraculously undertaken from Makkah to Jerusalem and from there to the heavens and the Divine Presence.

Described in the Qur'ān,^{xxii} with details in all traditional sources,^{xxiii} this event has been interpreted as foretelling the announcement for the abrogation^{xxiv} of the right of custodianship and belonging of the Jews, hence providing justification for it.^{xxv} The counter argument points out that Islamic literature of the last 14 centuries, both exegetical and historical, is completely silent on the issue. The divine purpose understood from these verses by Islamic scholarship throughout the ages was that which is explicitly mentioned in the verses i.e. "...so we might show him some of our signs!" and no Qur'ān commentator had ever derived this farfetched, novel conclusion. On the contrary, commentators contemporary with the four authors responsible for the modified memory, namely, Amīn Ahsan Islāhī, Sayyid Sulaymān Nadawī, Abū al-A'lā Mawdūdī and Qāri Muhammad Tayyib, have made no mention of these views and have even recorded the opposite.^{xxvi} Moreover, the Qur'ānic text, seven verses later, while describing the destruction of the Temple and the expulsion of the Jews, makes it categorically clear that it was a provisional and conditional punishment which could be changed with the change of heart of the children of Israel: "*Perhaps your Lord may show mercy to you. If you should turn back, We will go back too.*"^{xxvii}

4– THE CHANGE OF QIBLAH (CENTRE OR PLACE OF RITUAL ORIENTATION).

Another argument that has been advanced with regard to the abrogation of the right of custodianship /relationship of the Jews pertains to the change of *Qiblah* which took place after the migration of the prophet from Makkah to the city of Medina. When the Muslim community had settled in Medina, in order to test their faith and to generate a sense of intimacy with the Jewish community, God commanded the Muslims to pray facing towards the direction of Jerusalem and for 17 months the Muslim community continued to make their ritual orientation during the canonical prayer towards the *Al-Aqsā Mosque* i.e. Jerusalem. Later on, Islamic revelation asked them to change it once more towards "The Inviolable Mosque", the Ka'bah.^{xxviii} Building his argument on this event, Sayyid Sulaymān Nadawī, wrote that "the holy house (the Temple), the second *Qiblah* of Islam and its custodianship is the right of the Muslim community."^{xxix} The counter argument points out that the context completely denied any such interpretation. The change of *Qiblah* had a completely different significance and, moreover, the internal evidence of the Qur'ānic text leads to a different conclusion. The change was a test of faith,^{xxx} which the Prophet did not like^{xxxi} and which the Jews also were

unhappy about, as they would have preferred that the Muslims should keep praying towards their *Qiblah*. When one adds to this the views of the earlier Islamic scholarship, which had looked at the event as an act of reaching out to the Jews, to invite them to Islam and to make them think kindly of it,^{xxxii} one realizes that the entire event had nothing to do with the abrogation of custodianship. Moreover, if the Muslim right is supposed to have been established by the visit of the Prophet of Islam to the *Al-Aqsā Mosque* and by praying towards that direction for a brief period of time, then, by the same token, the Jews can claim a greater right because this place had been their *Qiblah* for 3000 years. A pilgrimage to this place is a part of their religious obligations and scores of their prophets and priests had been preaching and worshipping in this holy place.^{xxxiii}

5– APPLYING THE WORD MASJID TO THE TEMPLE.

Another argument has been made claiming that since the Jews named the place of worship built by the Prophet Solomon by the word temple and since God has mentioned it by the name of *masjid* (lit: a place of prostration) in the Qur’ān, it is a proof text that the Jews have no right over it because the word *masjid* can only be used for a Muslim place of worship.^{xxxiv} The counter argument points out the inherent weakness of the thesis by referring to the Qur’ānic text which uses the word *masjid* both for the places of worship (churches and synagogues) of the People of the Book in many of its verses.^{xxxv} The Prophetic Hadīth also provide example of the same usage.^{xxxvi}

6– GLAD TIDINGS OF THE CONQUEST OF THE HOLY LAND.

The quotation given above with reference to the change of *Qiblah*^{xxxvii} also mentions the prophecy for the conquest of the holy land as a proof for the abrogation of the right of relationship. According to the counter argument, the prophecy is completely unrelated to the question of custodianship. Moreover, according to Islamic law, since the city of Jerusalem was not “conquered” by the Caliph ‘Umar and was surrendered as a result of a treaty, it cannot be treated as a conquered land hence the status of its places of worship is necessarily different.^{xxxviii}

This is just a brief sampling of some of workings of the modified memory and the restoration of the truthful memory through our soul searching debate. Leaving it here let me present the salient points of the debate.

Salient points of the debate could be summarised in the following.

- Along with the Muslim mosques, the Qur'ān grants the status of "houses built for the remembrance of God" to the places of worship of other faiths and enjoins their respect and safeguard. *Al-Aqsā Mosque*, apart from having this general sanctity, carries another distinction; it was built by a great prophet of Israel and throughout history it had been the centre of the prophetic missions of scores of other prophets. Islam considers all the prophets as belonging to a single chain of divine guidance, teaches to give equal respect and reverence to all the prophets and counsels to hold their relics and historical remains in honour. Therefore the Prophet of Islam described the *Al-Aqsā Mosque* as the third best mosque in the world that is ranked in excellence. After the takeover of Jerusalem in 638 the Muslims reclaimed and renovated this extremely holy place of worship that had fallen derelict for centuries. According to the principal teachings of the Qur'ān and the prophetic Sunna, this action taken by the Muslim community was purely based on respect, reverence and devotion. It was not driven by any idea of a "right of possession" or a claim for exclusive custodianship. **They had accepted the responsibility of being the custodians of the holy precinct as vicegerents or stewards in the absence of the Jews.**
- Respect and reverence towards centres of worship and places of spiritual orientation are foundational to religious life. From recognition of the sanctity of space arise deep religious feelings. These can be seen in the case of the Jewish people and its continuing attachment to the site of the former Temple. The deep sense of loss following its destruction and the enduring hope for the future rebuilding nurtured millions of souls over the centuries. These sentiments are lofty, blessed and natural. The Qur'ān not only mentions explicitly the fact that the Jews became deprived of their centre of worship, due to falling short of their religious responsibilities and going against the covenant, it also speaks of the possibility that if they repented this centre could be given back to their possession once again. Since the time of the revelation of the Qur'ān the religious conditions for rebuilding the Temple did not exist. Jews were not in a position, politically and collectively, to make a demand for it or to undertake any practical efforts to that effect. The custodianship of the precinct remained therefore with the Muslim community. **This extended period of almost 13 centuries imperceptibly worked into the Muslim's psyche a sense of**

belonging and an idea of a divine right of possession which pushed the real issue and its true nature into the background. The true memory was overshadowed by untruthful memories. Muslims lost sight of the expectation of Jews for the rebuilding of the Temple in the Messianic Era, failing to recognize it as an important part of the Jewish creed, distinct in quality from Islamic attitudes of devotion, respect and reverence for the holy land.

- In the last century when interest in the status of the Temple began to emerge in Jewish circles, such interest arose in relation or in the context of the Zionist movement. The moral responsibility of the Muslim community, undoubtedly, required that it should have treated the matter with objectivity, with a complete disregard for political conflicts, in the correct religious and legal Islamic perspective and in the light of the principles of Islamic teachings, that is, with justice, impartiality and fair play.^{xxxix} The cardinal teaching of Islam with regard to places of worship is of a divinely ordained tolerance and acceptance. Yet in the case of the *Al-Aqsā Mosque* the more one analyses the attitudes and positions taken by the Muslim community it becomes clearer that it has been overcome by a mental state that could only be termed as **"the psychology of the right of possession"**. As a result, a series of intellectual deviations came into play, leading to declarations that the custodianship of the *Al-Aqsā Mosque*, which had been **"entrusted" to the Muslims by historical circumstances**, was the permanent religious right of possession of the Muslims and the Jews had no claim over the holy precinct. These deviations were of different categories: One group of scholars categorically denied the continuous and uninterrupted Muslim view of the history of the *Al-Aqsā Mosque*. Another group adopted the position that the custodianship conferred on the Muslim community was not given to it through the working of history and by contingent situations; it was a permanent and inalienable religious right. A third group showed complete disregard for religious ethics, their moral obligations and the principal teachings of the Qur'ān and the prophetic Sunna and went as far as claiming that the actual situation of the last 13 centuries was the decisive and ineluctable factor. These deviations have contributed to sentiments running high and tensions rising to the point that no one is prepared to undertake an objective and nonpartisan scholarly research and analysis of the problem.

- The upshot of all this is that the issue of the *Al-Aqsā Mosque* has become a moral dilemma and a test for making right ethical choices for the Muslim community. In its own way, this situation mirrors the test that the children of Israel have faced in the past. Unfortunately the Muslim community too has fallen short of the desired high moral ground, like their predecessors. In the present day geopolitical situation the question of custodianship and right of possession for the Palestinian lands is essentially a political issue. It is completely understandable that it gave rise to a negative response from the Arab nations and the Muslim community at large. Nevertheless, this reaction is far from justice. It is completely unbecoming of the Muslim community to characterize the Jewish religious sentiment as “a sacrilege of the *Al-Aqsā Mosque*”, to turn it into a blameworthy attitude, to fall into a complete denial of the historical and religious roots of the Jewish view of the Temple Mount, to refuse to honour their ongoing feeling of relationship and— ultimately as the worst consequence— to deprive them of the right of worship in the precinct. The position and attitudes of the Muslim community, on the practical and political levels, have deviated from the high moral ground provided by Qur’ānic perspective and Prophetic example. Swept away by historical expediencies and prevailed over by political opportuneness, having neglected self-criticism and soul searching, this attitude amounts to moral failure. The reason for this growing failure is that over the years the community’s collective memory has become encrusted with layers of distorted memories, causing it to move away from “truthfulness” of memory and, consequently act in ways that could hardly be termed as just and fair.

THE IMPACT FACTOR

Apart from suggesting a viable solution to the problem[which is detailed in [Annex A](#)] the impact of the debate was considerable. By revisiting the issue, analysing collective memory for untruthful elements, and reframing memories with reference to the basic texts of the Tradition, the divine perspective and eschatological vision were brought back into the picture. The Urdu and English Media, that was largely unaware of the classical and normative position of the Muslim community on the issue as well as of its narrative in the Qur’ān, prophetic traditions and the classical works of Islamic scholarship, was able to present an informed discourse on the issue. The curricula, both of the religious centres of teaching and the

public system of education, contrary to a widespread belief, did not actually contain any hate materials in the textbooks. That attitude had been originated and perpetuated through different channels and even that only in some of the institutions of religious learning. In these sectors where such a way of thinking had come to dominate, the counter narrative was introduced which made some inroads into the prevalent discourse.

Politicians were also among the beneficiaries in the sense that they now had access to an alternative view of the question that was so clearly grounded in the traditional sources hence providing them with a way out from the intimidating religious discourse that had engulfed them earlier and which had become laden with an atmosphere of emotional blackmail. Obviously this did not go to the extent of generating enough conviction within the political authorities in Pakistan to officially accept the State of Israel. Nevertheless, it went a long way to create among the educated a widespread awareness of the Jewish concern for the present and future status of the Temple, distinct from the Islamic attitude of respect and reverence for the holy land.

Perhaps even more importantly, it worked as holding a mirror to the Muslim community of the region wherein it could see that it had succumbed to the political exigencies and was losing its high moral ground by moving away from justice and harmony.

Annex- A
IS THERE A VIABLE SOLUTION TO THE
PROBLEM OF THE TEMPLE MOUNT?

The debate mentioned in the text leads to the question of whether there is a viable solution to the problem of the Temple Mount that could be acceptable to both parties. Is there a way to negotiate a situation in which no one is deprived of the right of worship in this holy place and neither of the parties becomes a non-stake holder? Is there a possibility that both parties could have the rights of custodianship and worship in the holy precinct? To the direct questions such as these, it is good to give an equally direct answer: Yes— unequivocally and unabashedly. This would, however, require revisiting the important aspects of the history of the problem.

The Temple Mount, currently known as "*Al-Haram al-Sharif*" (the Noble Holy precinct), is a rectangular area of approximately 45 acres. Within this

precinct Prophet Solomon (upon him be peace) had built the magnificent holy temple of worship which is historically known as Solomon’s Temple. The location of the building, the description of its construction and the confines of the precinct were demarcated in the Bible. After its destruction in 586 BC at the hands of Nebūchadnezzar,^{x1} (Nabukht Nasr), the second temple was built exactly on the same foundations and according to Jewish tradition the third construction of the Temple would also take place on these foundations. In a larger area around the original building of the Temple (i.e. the furthest Mosque) a boundary wall was also erected by King Herod of Judea in 19 BC. The boundary walls defined by Herod exists until today.

In 638 AD Jerusalem was conquered under the leadership of the Caliph ‘Umar. The heaps of debris were cleared and after cleansing the holy precinct of the filth and garbage, a centre of worship was selected near the southern wall of the precinct where, later on, a regular mosque was constructed. In the initial years this mosque was named the “‘Umar Mosque”^{xli} but as the Muslim community only consecrated this small area for their ritual worship, in Islamic parlance the expression “Al-Aqsā Mosque” gradually changed its connotation. Instead of its original meaning, that is, Solomon’s Temple and the wall that surrounded the precinct, it was now used for this specific mosque. The caliph ‘Abd al-Malik bin Marwān built a dome in the centre of the precinct over the holy Rock. These are still the two dominant and important constructions within the confines of the precinct. Following in the footsteps of ‘Abd al-Malik bin Marwān, Muslims built large and small domes in the same area over the years that were given different names.

Practically, this holy precinct is in the possession of the Muslim community for centuries and on the basis of this historical continuity the *Muslim Endowment Committee of Jerusalem* has taken the position that the Jews have no right whatsoever on any part of the precinct and that to give them a right of possession or custodianship over a portion of the precinct would go against the rulings of the Islamic law. The grand mufti of Palestine ‘Ikrama Sabri formulated this position in the following words: *“all the buildings surrounding the Al-Aqsā Mosque have the status of an Islamic endowment. The doors, windows and passages of these buildings directly open out unto the Al-Aqsā Mosque and with regards to sanctity and holiness these carry the same status which is of the Al-Aqsā Mosque.*

Therefore according to the Islamic law, taking away any of these buildings and turning it into a place of worship of the Jews is an impossibility.”
(<http://www.la.utexas.edu/>)

In our view the root of the conflict lies in this extremist standpoint of the *Muslim Endowment Committee*. It is necessary to revise this interpretation. It is a requirement not only of the basic Islamic texts of the Qur’ān and the Sunnah but it is strongly supported by the attitude and practice that the Muslim community, while being in possession of the precinct of the Temple Mount, had adopted over the past centuries with regard to the construction of the Temple. In the light of the detailed discussion above it could be said with confidence that the entire precinct of the Temple Mount, including the Dome of the Rock, being a relic of the “Al-Aqsā Mosque” (the Mosque [Temple] of Prophet Solomon, upon him be peace) carries the general status of holiness and respect according to the Muslim lights. Nevertheless, religiously and historically, there is no justification or any necessity to put forward a claim for exclusive rights of possession or custodianship over the entire precinct of the Temple Mount. Such a claim must be limited to the confines of the present day Al-Aqsā Mosque. According to our view this is the cardinal point that could provide us with a practical solution to the conflict. Looking at the issue from this angle would lead Muslims to approach the sanctity of this place of worship in a way that is completely different from that of the Jewish point of view, thereby avoiding conflict. As far as the Jews are concerned, their basic interest is in maintaining the sanctity of the Temple site and an eschatological hope for the eventual reconstruction, in the Messianic era, of the third Temple on the same foundations on which Prophet Solomon (upon him be peace) had built the first Temple and Ezra built the second Temple. Centuries have passed over the destruction of the Temple, its boundary wall had been extended and several constructions took place during the intervening period. Therefore it is not possible to determine the actual foundations of the Temple with any certainty without excavation and archaeological research. However on the basis of the details provided by the Bible and the Talmud the Jewish scholars have tried to find out these foundations. There are three views in this regard.

According to the first, called the traditional point of view, commonly supported by Jewish scholars and Rabbis, Solomon’s Temple was situated very near the place where the Dome of the Rock is situated today. Most

Jewish archaeologists also uphold this view. Recent research has departed from the traditional view by suggesting that the Temple was situated slightly away from the Dome of the Rock. According to the view of the physicist Asher Kaufman of the Rakach Institute of Physics of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, the most sacred part of the Temple, that is, the Holy of the Holies, was situated towards the north of the Dome of the Rock, at a place where the stone in the Dome of the Spirits is located.

According to the view of one of the eminent architects of Tel Aviv, Tuvia Sagiv, the Temple was located towards the south of the Dome of the Rock. This location falls at an equal distance between the Dome of the Rock and the present day Aqsa Mosque where nowadays Al-Ka’s fountains is to be seen.^{xliii}

The proper religious motive of the Muslim community the authentic (i.e. the pre-politicized, Muslim view) is not related to gaining the right of custodianship or possession, let alone to reconstruct the mosque on the actual foundations of the Temple. Their only demand is to retain the right of worship in this holy place. Therefore, whatever significance the specific location of the Temple described in the Bible or its stipulated parameters might have according to Jewish tradition, for Muslims the entire holy precinct is of an equal status with regard to holiness, spiritual excellence and promise of greater reward of worship in it. Furthermore, even if the boundaries of the precinct were extended, no change would come about in its status of being meritorious and rewarding with regard to the acts of worship. That is precisely the reason why the place mentioned in the traditions as the location where the Prophet of Islam offered his ritual prayers on the occasion of his nocturnal journey to Jerusalem is situated within the precincts of the Temple but away from the actual building of the Temple. After the conquest of Jerusalem in 638 AD Muslims expressed no interest in finding the specific foundations of the Temple and, following the example of the Caliph ‘Umar, started praying at the same location where the Prophet of Islam had offered his ritual prayers and later on built a regular mosque on the same place, initially named “‘Umar Mosque”.^{xliiii} This is the mosque which is now called the “Al-Aqsā Mosque”. Whichever of the three locations suggested by the Jewish scholars be accepted as the real locale of the historical Temple, the present day “Al-Aqsā Mosque” is not affected by it.

The upshot is this: there is a viable solution to the problem of the Temple Mount, safeguarding the right of custodianship of the Muslims for the “Al-Aqsā Mosque”. Obviously, this solution is readily acceptable by the Jewish religious circles, but the Muslim community would need to undergo a conceptual shift by distancing itself from erroneous ideas that have been devised in order to deny the right of custodianship of the entire place of worship for the Jews. In this regard they must keep in view the example set by the practice of the Caliph ‘Umar as a guiding principle which limits the rights of the Muslim community to the place where, according to the traditions, the Prophet of Islam performed his ritual prayers and which the Caliph ‘Umar demarcated for the Muslim place of worship.

Annex– B

BRIEF HISTORY OF THE FURTHEST MOSQUE (*AL-AQSĀ MOSQUE*) A MUSLIM NARRATIVE

In order to provide more background material related to the issue and to situate it directly in the Muslim context, a brief history of the Furthest Mosque (*Al-Aqsā Mosque*), as found in the Muslim narrative, is presented here. Collected and edited from various sources it is a representative sampling of what the Muslim scholarship and religious stakeholders think about the issue and the historical data on which they base their views.

With regard to the religions which are as it were rooted in Abraham, the city of Jerusalem is of immense importance to all three of them, to each in its own particular way. The city of Medina on the other hand belongs to Islam alone; but this cannot be said of Mecca, even sacramentally speaking, for the Psalms are among the greatest treasures of both Judaism and Christianity, and Mecca is extolled in the Psalms as one of the “Lovable Tabernacles” of God.^{xliv}

Once the Jews came out of the slavery of the Egyptians and Prophet Moses was given the Law in the desert of Sinai, he received commands from the Lord for the various forms of worship and sacrifices that were to be carried out in the Tent of Gathering. Details of the structure of the Tent and the objects that had to be placed in the Tent were given to Prophet Moses (upon him be peace).^{xlv} This Tent has been mentioned in the Torah by different names. Prophet Moses was also commanded to prepare a box of a specific form and place the tablets of the Torah in it and to put the box permanently at a specified location in the Tent of Gathering.^{xlvi} The Torah

calls it Ark of the Covenant. In 1450 BC Jerusalem was conquered following the Divine command under the leadership of Joshua b. Nūn and during the following four centuries the children of Israel were engaged in their struggle with the inhabitants of the region. Since their possession of the land of Palestine and their political domination was not yet firmly established, the Tent of Gathering remained their (mobile) centre of worship. Finally during the times of Prophet David (upon him be peace) the children of Israel succeeded in laying the foundations for a permanent kingdom whereupon Prophet David received the command from the Lord to build a centre of worship^{xlvi} for which he bought the land^{xlviii} and started the initial preparations^{xlvi} but as he could not complete the construction during his lifetime the task was bequeathed to Prophet Solomon (upon him be peace).¹ In 950 BC Prophet Solomon built the magnificent temple of worship which is historically known as Solomon’s Temple.^{li} Thus Solomon’s Temple became the place of orientation for the worship and religious rites and the centre of religious and social life of the children of Israel instead of the Tent of Gathering. An altar^{lii} was built for the burnt offerings and a special space was created for the Ark of the Covenant in the Temple.^{liii} The prayer which the Prophet Solomon had made^{liv} at the occasion of its completion clearly indicated that this place of worship had been made a spiritual centre and gathering place for the children of Israel, a Tabernacle– *Mathābah*^{lv} in the words of the Qur’ān– just like the “The Inviolable Mosque” at Makkah was made the Tabernacle for the children of Ishmael.

Thus this place of worship became not only a centre of religious and social life of the children of Israel but a symbol of their political power and worldly glory and magnificence. Words of warning and admonition had also arrived from the Lord on the tongue of Prophet Solomon,^{lvi} a prophecy that finds its parallel account in the Qur’ānic narrative.^{lvii} The prophecy came to pass after 350 years after construction of Solomon’s Temple during the times of the prophet Jeremiah as the children of Israel deviated from the Covenant. Nebūchadnezzar,^{lviii} (Nabukht Nasr) the King of Babylon, prevailed upon them, destroyed the Temple and after a lot of loot, pillage and bloodshed, carried the children of Israel with him to Babylon in 586 BC.^{lix} The children of Israel repented, mended their ways and as a result God once again gave back their freedom. Cyrus, the King of Persia, after conquering Babylon in 538 BC, allowed them to return to Jerusalem and once again build the Temple.^{lx}

The foundation of the building, map of its construction and the confines of the precinct were explicitly demarcated in the Mosaic Law. Nobody had the right to alter these conditions, therefore, in 515/520 BC, the second Temple was built under the direction of Ezra on the same site and exactly on the same foundations but this new building, for its modest construction, was no comparison to the original Temple of Solomon.^{lxi} This Temple endured for another 350 years though it had to face the assaults of various invaders from time to time. In 169 BC the Greek Emperor Antiochus Epiphanes the Fourth conquered the land, took over the Temple and plundered all its belongings and treasures^{lxii} which resulted in the revolt of the Maccabees who, under the leadership of Judas Maccabeus, succeeded in getting rid of the invaders, recovered the Temple and purified and cleansed it.^{lxiii} The Jewish annual feast of Hanukkah remembers the event. A large part of the second Temple (of Zerubbabel) was brought to ruins when the Roman army, led by General Pompey, conquered Palestine and the Temple though, later on, the Romans conferred semi political autonomy on the Jews. The King of Judaea, Herod the Great (37 BC–4 BC), while reconstructing the Temple from 19 BC to the following 46 years, increased the area of the precinct and built it on an elevated plinth. In a larger area around the original building of the Temple a boundary wall was also erected which underwent extensions in two stages; first by the King Herod of Judea in 19 BC and then by the Roman Emperor Hadrian in 136 AD. The boundary wall defined by Hadrian exists till today.

The second prophecy concerning the destruction of Solomon’s Temple came to pass in 70 AD. In 66 AD the Jews rose in rebellion against the Roman Empire and General Titus invaded Jerusalem to put an end to the insurgency in 70 AD. There was a massacre of the Jews and the Temple was destroyed. Only the western wall of the Temple survived the catastrophe and gradually it became a gathering place of the Jews and the location of mourning, hence the name of “Wailing Wall”.

Renovating the city, Emperor Hadrian named it AeliaCapitolina and erected a huge temple in the name of Roman god Jupiter on the location where Solomon’s Temple existed earlier and as Christianity became the state religion in the 4th century AD Constantine the Great converted the place into the Church of Resurrection.

In 638 AD, when Jerusalem was conquered by the Muslim forces, Caliph ‘Umar visited the city along with a few other Companions of the Prophet. The precinct of the Temple Mount was found to have become a “waste disposal site” and the holy site of the Rock was covered by heaps of filth and garbage. ‘Umar showed great respect for the place and aided by the other Companions himself cleared the site and after cleansing the holy precinct demarcated a location for Muslim worship area near the southern wall of the precinct where, later on, an rectangular wooden mosque was constructed. In the initial years this mosque was named as the “Umar Mosque.”^{lxiv} In 688 AD the Umayyid Caliph ‘Abd al-Malik bin Marwān built a majestic dome in the centre of the precinct over the holy Rock which is known by the name of the “Dome of the Rock”. “Umar Mosque” was also rebuilt with extensions. This is the site and the specific mosque that has always been referred to as the “Al-Aqsā Mosque” in Islamic sources. These are still the two dominant and important constructions within the confines of the precinct. Following in the footsteps of ‘Abd al-Malik b.Marwān, Muslims built large and small domes in the same area over the years that were given different names.

In 1078 AD the Seljuk Turks took control of Jerusalem. Christian pilgrims were made unwelcome in the holy land. During their reign of 20 years, facilitation was scant and their rights of visiting were not safeguarded giving rise to a wave of anger and resentment in Europe that culminated in the Crusades in 1096 AD. Following the Papal edict of Pope Urban the Second Christian warriors assailed the lands and took over “Al-Aqsā Mosque” and “Dome of the Rock” in 1099 AD. “Dome of the Rock” was converted into a Church with a cross installed on top of the Dome and icons of the Christian Saints and martyrs installed. An altar was erected on the Rock entitled *Templum Domini* while the Al-Aqsā Mosque was named *Templum Solomonis*.

After a period of 88 years Muslim forces, led by Salahuddin Ayyubi, captured Jerusalem in 1187 AD and the Islamic status of the “Al-Aqsā Mosque” was restored. During the intervening centuries the holy land was under the rule of various Muslim dynasties until the Arab Israel war of 1967 when Israel gained control of the Eastern part of Jerusalem where the “Al-Aqsā Mosque” is situated. Moshe Dayan, the Defence Minister of Israel, nevertheless, handed over the keys of the Mosque to the Hashemite ruling family of Jordan as a token of goodwill. Since then the control of

the precinct and some of its adjacent buildings is in the hands of the Muslim Endowment Committee which looks after its affairs.

Annex C

PERSPECTIVE

For thousands of years already, humanity has been divided into several fundamentally different branches, which constitute so many complete humanities, more or less closed in on themselves; the existence of spiritual receptacles so different and so original demands differentiated refractions of the one Truth.^{lxv} This being so, it can be said that the diverse Revelations do not really contradict one another, since they do not apply to the same receptacle, and since God never addresses the same message to two or more receptacles of divergent character, corresponding analogically, that is, to dimensions which are formally incompatible; contradictions arise only on one and the same level.^{lxvi} If Revelations more or less exclude one another, this is so of necessity because God, when He speaks, expresses Himself in absolute mode; but this absoluteness relates to the universal content rather than to the form; it applies to the latter only in are lative and symbolical sense, because the form is a symbol of the content and so too of humanity as a whole, to which this content is, precisely, addressed.

An idea or an enterprise which comes up against insurmountable obstacles is contrary to the nature of things; the ethnic diversity of humanity and the geographical extent of the earth suffice to make highly unlikely the axiom of one unique religion for all men, and on the contrary highly likely– to say the least– the need for a plurality of religions; in other words, the idea of a single religion does not escape contradiction if one takes account of its claims to absoluteness and universality on the one hand, and the psychological and physical impossibility of their realisation on the other.

The plurality of revelations, like the diversity of human communities, is divinely-willed, and not the result of some human contingency. Universal revelation and human diversity alike are expressions of divine wisdom. They are also signs intimating the infinitude of the divine nature itself: *'And among His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the differences of your languages and colours. Indeed, herein are signs for those who know (30:22).'* Just as God is both absolutely one yet immeasurably infinite, so the human race is one in its essence, yet infinitely

variegated in its forms. Notwithstanding the many verses critical of earlier religious traditions, the fundamental message of the Qur'ān as regards all previous revelations is one of inclusion not exclusion, protection and not destruction. Arguably the most important verse in this regard is: *'We have revealed unto you the Scripture with the Truth, to confirm and protect the Scripture which came before it ... For each We have appointed a Law and a Way. Had God willed, He could have made you one community. But that He might try you by that which He has given you [He has made you as you are]. So vie with one another in good works. Unto God you will all return, and He will inform you of that wherein you differed'* (5:48).

This verse, supplemented by a multitude of other proof texts (given in the endnotes), establishes four crucial principles that enshrine the Qur'ānic Vision which both fashion and substantiate an open-minded approach to all religions and their adherents and inculcates the attitude that if God is the ultimate source of the different rites of the religions, no one set of rites can be legitimately excluded from the purview of authentic religion. :

- the Qur'ān confirms and protects all divine revelations;^{lxvii}
- the very plurality of these revelations is the result of a divine will for diversity on the plane of human communities;^{lxviii}
- this diversity of revelations and plurality of communities is intended to stimulate a healthy 'competition' or mutual enrichment in the domain of 'good works';^{lxix}
- differences of opinion are inevitable consequences of the very plurality of meanings embodied in diverse revelations; these differences are to be tolerated on the human plane, and will be finally resolved in the Hereafter.^{lxx}

The perspective of the contributors to the debate was informed by a set of basic perceptions that had emerged after sustained, serious deliberations on one of the core problems that had marred Jewish-Muslim relations over the years.

- The issue is very much alive today and directly related to our present day geo-political situation as it is not the case of a religious and ethical issue; it is deeply intertwined with the political dimension of the larger Palestinian problem. Having strong and decisive religious

underpinnings, it could be rightly termed as the major and most crucial religious issue of contemporary world.

- The unrealistic policies and attitudes that the Arab world has adopted with regard to Israel, if analysed, could be traced back to the issue of the *Al-Aqsā Mosque* (called the furthest Mosque in the Qur'ān)^{lxxi} and the psychological environment in which these strategies have emerged has been primarily nourished by the predominant idea of the exclusive right of possession of the holy precinct by the Muslim community.
- The question of affirming the historical roots of the Jews and honouring their ongoing feeling of relationship to the Temple Mount and the holy places of Jerusalem— most often phrased as “custodianship and ownership/possession by the Jews” in the Muslim narrative— is the foremost and one of the most difficult problems that creates impediments for a sustainable peace in the region.
- The position and attitudes of the Muslim community, on the practical and political levels, have deviated from the high moral ground provided by Qur'ānic perspective and Prophetic example. Swept away by historical expediencies and prevailed over by political opportuneness, having neglected self-criticism and soul searching, this attitude amounts to moral failure. The reason for this growing failure is that over the years the community's collective memory has become encrusted with layers of distorted memories, causing it to move away from “truthfulness” of memory and, consequently act in ways that could hardly be termed as just and fair.

Endnotes

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- ⁱ It is only a written book as a matter of convenience and as a concession to human weakness.
- ⁱⁱ The grand mufti of Palestine 'Ikrama Sabri formulated this position in the following words: *“all the buildings surrounding the Al-Aqsā Mosque have the status of an Islamic endowment. The doors, windows and passages of these buildings directly open out unto the Al-Aqsā Mosque and with regards to sanctity and holiness these carry the same status which is of the Al-Aqsā Mosque. Therefore according to the Islamic law, taking away any of these buildings and turning it into a place of worship of the Jews is an impossibility.”* (<http://www.la.utexas.edu/>)
- ⁱⁱⁱ Qur'ān, 4: 135; also repeated in another verse in a slightly different manner: *“You who believe, act steadfast before God as witnesses for fair play even though it is against yourselves, your own parents and near relatives; whether it concerns a rich or a poor man, God stands closer to them both. Do not follow any passion so that you may deal justly. If you swerve about or turn aside, God is still informed about whatever you do”* Qur'ān, 5: 8.

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- iv And during the early Islamic history it had also served as the *qiblah* (centre or place of ritual orientation) for the Islamic community.
- v Amīn Ahsan Islāhī (d. 2000) was one of the most outstanding scholars of the early 20th century India. Founder of an influential school of Qur’ānic exegesis, religious leader, prolific writer, public speaker, social activist Islāhī left an impressive legacy of books and students. His *Tafsīr Tadabbur-i Qur’ān* is regarded as one of the three best Qur’ān commentaries of the 20th century.
- vi Sayyid Sulaymān Nadawī (d. 1948) was the leading scholar, writer, historian, journalist and religious leader of the school of Nadawa. His *Sīrat al-Nabī* (the life of the Prophet) and the philosophic and religious writings had influenced generations of Muslims in the 20th century.
- vii The founder of the famous Islamic Party (Jama‘at-i Islami), Abū al-A‘lā Mawdūdī was also a religious leader, prolific writer, public speaker and social activist whose followers are still active in the Pakistani society as well as in the Arab world.
- viii Qārī Muhammad Tayyib was the rector of the biggest Muslim religious seminary/university of India, Deoband. A prolific writer, prestigious public speaker, Tayyib exerted a great influence on the masses and as well as the educated Muslim classes through his works as well as in his capacity of the head of the biggest institution in India.
- ix With some spread out in the English readership through translations.
- x Spread over a period of several years, in the form of arguments and counter arguments, responses and counter responses that filled hundreds of pages of various scholarly religious journals, appearing in book form later on. See Muhammad ‘Ammār Khan Nāsir, *Barāhīn*, Dār al-Kitāb, Lahore, 2011.
- xi It deserves mention that the religious parties are significant stakeholders in Pakistani politics, the mainstream right wing political parties have their own religious affiliations and then become under influence from the religious parties with the issue has a religious bearing. Even the “secular” political parties cannot completely ignore the religious dimension of the problems.
- xii title which itself is a modern invention. The Prophet of Islam, when he described the *Al-Aqsā Mosque* as the third best mosque in the world, had actually referred to the Solomon’s Temple. *Ḥaram* (Inviolable Precinct) is a technical legal term of the Islamic Sharī‘ah and there is no proof with reference to the Qur’ān and the prophetic Sunna the *Al-Aqsā Mosque* was ever given the status of a third *Ḥaram* in Islamic history. The usage of *Al-Ḥaram* for the *Al-Aqsā Mosque* has been denounced by the Islamic scholarship, both ancient and contemporary. See Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā*, 26/117; Anṣārī, *Tahṣīl al-Uns li Zāi’r al-Quds*, Cf. *Fazīlat-i Bayt al-Maqdas...*, 43; Ruling No. 5387 of the Permanent Legal Committee of Saudi Arabia (*Fatāwā Lajnah al-Dā‘imah*, 6/227)
- xiii On the question of a practical solution see [Annex A](#).
- xiv *For every community there is a Messenger (10:47). We have sent you as an announcer and a warner about the Truth. No nation exists unless some warner has passed among them. (35:24). And We never sent a messenger save with the language of his people, so that he might make [Our message] clear to them (14:4). ‘Unto each community We have given sacred rites (mansakan) which they are to perform; so let them not dispute with you about the matter, but summon them unto your Lord (22:67). And We never sent a messenger save with the language of his people, so that he might make [Our message] clear to them (14:4).*
- xv *“Perhaps your Lord may show mercy to you. If you should turn back, We will go back too. (Qur’ān, 17:8)*
- xvi As if by Divine intervention.
- xvii That was rooted in the Qur’ān and the normative practice of the Prophet.
- xviii Deuteronomy, 30:1-5.
- xix Sayyid Sulaymān Nadawī, *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. III, p. 254.

- xx Sayyid SulaymānNadawī, *Maqālāt-i Sulaymān*, Vol. III, p. 68-69.
- xxi Qur’ān, 9:17-18.
- xxii Qur’ān, 17:1– “Glory be to Him who took His slave by night from the inviolable Mosque unto the furthest Mosque whose precincts We have made blessed so We might show him some of Our signs! He is the Alert, the Observant!”
- xxiii See Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Azīm*, Vol. VII, p. 34;– *Al-Bidāya wa ‘l-Nihāyah*, Vol. VII, p. 109-111, in which has recorded the reports according to which, upon his arrival in Jerusalem, the Prophet of Islam led the prayers at the Temple of Solomon and the other prophets joined him in worship.
- xxiv AmīnAḥsanIṣlāhī, *TafsīrTadabbur-i Qur’ān*, Vol. III, p. 470.
- xxv Sayyid SulaymānNadawī, *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. III, p. 252-253.
- xxvi Shabbīr A. ‘Uthmānī, *Tafsīr ‘Uthmānī*, p. 347; Mufti Muhammad Shafī‘, *TafsīrMa‘ārif al-Qur’ān*, Karachi, 1984.
- xxvii Qur’ān, 17:8.
- xxviii Qur’ān, 2:142-145.
- xxix Sayyid SulaymānNadawī, *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. III, p. 385.
- xxx Qur’ān, 2:143.
- xxxi Qur’ān, 2:143.
- xxxii Rāzī, *Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, Vol. IV, p. 115; Ibn ‘Arabī, *Ahkām al-Qur’ān* Vol. I, p. 40.
- xxxiii (<http://domino.un.unispal.nsf>)
- xxxiv Monthly *Al-Sharī‘ah*, December, 2003, p. 39.
- xxxv Qur’ān, 2:114; 18: 21.
- xxxvi Bukhārī, hadīth No. 409.
- xxxvii Sayyid SulaymānNadawī, *Sīrat al-Nabī*, Vol. III, p. 385.
- xxxviii Ibn Quddāmah, *Al-Mughnī*, Vol. IX, p. 284.
- xxxix Qur’ān, 5:2, 8 – (do not let ill will toward any folk incriminate you, just because the block your way to the hallowed mosque) (you who believe, act steadfast towards God, as witnesses for fair play, and so that you see swerve from dealing justly. Be just: that is nearest to heedfulness; and heedGod alone.)
- xl I have followed the spellings of the Catholic Bible (The New Revised Standard Version), Bangalore, India, 1993.
- xli See Ibn Kathīr, *Al-Bidāyawa ‘l-Nihāyah*, Vol. VII, p. 56.
- xlii Lambert Dolphin and Michael Kollen, “On the Location of the First and Second Temples is in Jerusalem”, (<http://dolphin.org/>)
- xliii See Ibn Kathīr, *Al-Bidāyawa ‘l-Nihāyah*, Vol. VII, p. 56.
- xliv Psalm 84, which begins with the words: *How amiable are Thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts, there is a reference to Hagar and her son as well: Blessed is the man whose strength is in Thee, in whose hearts are the ways of them who passing through the valley of Baca make it of a well* (5-6). However the vast majority of both Jews and Christians are unaware of the identity in question.
- xlv Exodus, 25-31; 36-38.
- xlvi Exodus, 40:20.
- xlvii Samuel, 5-7.
- xlviii Chronicles I, 21: 25.
- xlix Chronicles II, 3: 1. According to the primary sources of Islam, in this case the prophetic traditions recorded in Bukhārī, the Prophet of Islam was asked by one of his companions as to which was the first mosque built on the face of the earth?The Prophet replied, “The Inviolable Mosque” (Arabic name of the Holy Mosque and Tabernacle at Makkah/Bakkah). “What next” he was asked, to which he replied “*Al-Aqsā Mosque* (the Furthest Mosque)” and when he was questioned about the period that had passed between the two constructions he replied “40

- years” (Bukhārī, hadīth No. 3425). The apparent discrepancy in the text of the report with regard to the historical sequence has been resolved by the Hadīth scholarship by pointing towards the fact that, according to the Islamic tradition, and the actual location of the *Al-Aqsā Mosque* was specified by the prophet Jacob, to which the Prophet of Islam had alluded in his reply, while the actual construction by Solomon was carried out after several centuries. Islamic scholarship is also aware of the fact that Biblical scholarship, especially after the “conquest” of the historical criticism, has often raised doubts about the authenticity of the Biblical narrative pertaining to the grandeur and magnificence of the temple of Solomon (See *Jewish Encyclopedia*, WWW.Jewishencyclopedia.com).
- i Chronicles I, B 22; 28, 11-21.
- ii Details of the construction are recorded in Kings, I, 6-8 and Chronicles II, 3-5. According to the Qur’ānic narrative the Jinn (unseen creatures of a fiery nature) were subjugated for Prophet Solomon to help him accomplish the task (Qur’ān, 34: 12-14).
- iii Chronicles I, 22:1.
- iiii Chronicles I, 22:19.
- lv This extended prayer is saved in the Bible in Kings, I, 8: 22-53. Once again the Biblical account is corroborated by the primary sources of Islam, in this case the prophetic traditions recorded in Nassā’ī (No. 694) and Ibn Mājah (No. 1408) according to which the Prophet of Islam is reported to have said that, “*when the Prophet Solomon had finished the construction of the Al-Aqsā Mosque he prayed to the Lord that whoever visited this mosque for worship would return purified of his sins as if born of his mother’s womb on the day.*” He further added, “*I hope that the Lord must have listened to his prayer.*”
- lv Qur’ān, 2: 125.
- lvi Chronicles I, 9:1-9.
- lvii See Qur’ān, 17: 2-12.
- lviii I have followed the spellings of the Catholic Bible (The New Revised Standard Version), Bangalore, India, 1993.
- lix Chronicles II, 36:11-21; Jeremiah, 52:12-14.
- lx Ezra, 1
- lxi Haggai, 2: 3-9.
- lxii 1 Maccabees, 1: 20-24.
- lxiii 1 Maccabees, 4: 36-48.
- lxiv See Ibn Kathīr, *Al-Bidāyawa ‘l-Nihāyah*, Vol. VII, p. 56.
- lxv Let us note that this is not always a question of race, but more often of human groups, very diverse perhaps, but none the less subject to mental conditions which, taken as a whole, make of them sufficiently homogeneous spiritual recipients; though this fact does not prevent some individuals from being able to leave their framework, for the human collectivity never has anything absolute about it.
- lxvi The apparent antinomies between Traditions are like differences of language or of symbol; contradictions are in human receptacles, not in God; the diversity in the world is a function of its remoteness from the divine Principle, which amounts to saying that the Creator cannot will both that the world should be, and that it should not be the world.
- lxvii ‘*there is no compulsion in religion*’ (2:256); ‘*Permission [to fight] is given to those who are being fought, for they have been wronged ... Had God not driven back some by means of others, then indeed monasteries, churches, synagogues and mosques—wherein the name of God is oft-invoked—would assuredly have been destroyed*’(22: 39-40).
- lxviii The plurality of revelations, like the diversity of human communities, is divinely-willed, and not the result of some human contingency. Universal revelation and human diversity alike are expressions of divine wisdom. They are also signs intimating the infinitude of the divine nature itself: ‘*And among His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the*

differences of your languages and colours. Indeed, herein are signs for those who know (30:22).’ Just as God is both absolutely one yet immeasurably infinite, so the human race is one in its essence, yet infinitely variegated in its forms. The *fiṭra*, or primordial nature, is the inalienable substance of each human being and this essence of human identity takes priority over all external forms of identity such as race and nation, culture or even religion: ‘So set your purpose firmly for the faith as an original monotheist, [in accordance with] the *fiṭra* of God, by which He created mankind. There can be no altering the creation of God. That is the right religion, but most people know it not’ (30:30). The diversity of religious rites is also derived directly from God, affirmed by the following verse: ‘Unto each community We have given sacred rites (*mansakan*) which they are to perform; so let them not dispute with you about the matter, but summon them unto your Lord (22:67). For every community there is a Messenger (10:47). And We never sent a messenger save with the language of his people, so that he might make [Our message] clear to them (14:4). Truly We inspire you, as We inspired Noah, and the prophets after him, as We inspired Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the tribes, and Jesus and Job and Jonah and Aaron and Solomon, and as We bestowed unto David the Psalms; and Messengers We have mentioned to you before, and Messengers We have not mentioned to you (4:163-164). (emphasis added) And We sent no Messenger before you but We inspired him [saying]: There is no God save Me, so worship Me (21:25). Naught is said unto you [Muhammad] but what was said unto the Messengers before you (41:43).

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The ultimate goal in such a competition between religious believers is salvation. The performance of ‘good works’ (*khayrāt*) is intended not only to establish moral conduct on earth but also to grant access to that grace by which one attains salvation in the Hereafter. One of the key sources of religious intolerance is the exclusivist notion that one’s religion, alone, grants access to salvation, all others being false religions leading nowhere. This exclusivism is summed up in the Roman Catholic formula *extra ecclesiam nullas salus*: no salvation outside of the Church. This kind of exclusivism has no place in the Qur’ānic worldview, as is clearly demonstrated by such verses as the following: ‘Truly those who believe, and the Jews, and the Christians, and the Sabeans—whoever believes in God and the Last Day and performs virtuous deeds—surely their reward is with their Lord, and no fear shall come upon them, neither shall they grieve (2: 62; repeated almost verbatim at 5:69). The only criteria for salvation according to this verse are belief in the Absolute, and in accountability to that Absolute, conjoined to virtue in consequence of these beliefs. Given this clear expression of the universality of salvation, any lapse into the kind of religious chauvinism which feeds intolerance is impermissible. This is made clear in the following verses, which explicitly mention forms of religious exclusivism which the Muslims had encountered among various communities of the ‘People of the Book’: ‘And they say: “None enters Paradise unless he be a Jew or a Christian”. These are their vain desires. Say: “Bring your proof if you are truthful”. Nay, but whosoever submits his purpose to God, and he is virtuous, his reward is with his Lord. No fear shall come upon them, neither shall they grieve (2:111-112). In other words, the Muslim is not allowed to play the game of religious polemics. Instead of responding in kind to any sort of chauvinistic claims or ‘vain desires’ aimed at monopolising Paradise, the Muslim is instructed to raise the dialogue to a higher level, and to call for reasoned debate: ‘bring your proof’. The Qur’ānic position is to affirm the universal salvific criteria of piety, accessible to all human beings, whatever be their religious affiliation. This position is further affirmed in the following verses: ‘It will not be in accordance with your desires, nor with the desires of the People of the Book. He who does wrong will have its recompense ... And whoso performs good works, whether male or female, and is a believer, such will enter Paradise, and will not be wronged the dint of a date-stone. (4:123-124) One can read this verse as implying that insofar as the Muslim ‘desires’ that salvation be restricted to Muslims in the specific, communal sense, he

falls into exactly the same kind of exclusivism of which the Christians and Jews stand accused. It should be noted that the very same word is used both for the 'desires' of the Jews and the Christians, and the 'desires' of the Muslims, *amaniyy* (s. *umniyya*). The logic of these verses clearly indicates that one form of religious prejudice is not to be confronted with another form of the same error, but with an objective, unprejudiced recognition of the inexorable and universal law of divine justice, a law which excludes both religious nationalism and its natural concomitant, intolerance.

^{lxx} Given the fact that '*there is no compulsion in religion*' (2:256), it follows that differences of opinion must be tolerated and not suppressed. This theme is not unconnected with the principle of divine mercy: just as God's mercy is described as *encompassing all things* (7:156), so divine guidance through revelation encompasses all human communities. The Prophet is described as a '*mercy to the whole of creation*' (21:107), and his character is described as merciful and kind in the Qur'an (9:128); in the traditional sources the trait which is most often used to define the essence of his personality is *hilm*, a forbearance compounded of wisdom and gentleness. The tolerance accorded to the Other by the Prophet is thus an expression not only of knowledge of the universality of revelation, but also of the mercy, love and compassion from which this universal divine will to guide and save all peoples itself springs. Seen thus, the spirit of Islamic tolerance goes infinitely beyond a merely formal toleration of the Other; it is the outward ethical form assumed by one's conformity to the very nature of the divine, which encompasses all things '*in mercy and knowledge*' (40:7). It is also a mode of emulation of the prophetic nature: '*Say [O Muhammad]: If you love God, follow me; God will love you*' (3:31). To follow the Prophet means, among other things, to be gentle and lenient to all, in accordance with the *hilm* which defined his character: '*It was a mercy from God that you are gently disposed to them; had you been fierce and hard-hearted, they would have fled from you*' (3:159). In regard to the disbelievers, then, the Muslim is enjoined to let them go their way unmolested, to let them believe in their own 'religion': '*Say: O you who disbelieve, I worship not that which you worship, nor do you worship that which I worship. And I shall not worship that which you worship, nor will you worship that which I worship. For you your religion, for me, mine* (109:1-6)'. Returning to the duty to deliver the message and no more, there are a number of verses to note; for example:

'If they submit, they are rightly guided, but if they turn away, you have no duty other than conveying the message ... (3:20) *'If they are averse, We have not sent you as a guardian over them: your duty is but to convey the message* (42:48).'

^{lxxi} Qur'an, 17:1- "Glory be to Him who took His slave by night from the inviolable Mosque unto the furthest Mosque whose precincts We have made blessed..."

Abstract

The article attempts to explore the possibility to recover truthful memory about the Furthest Mosque as it is a religious mandate to engage in such recovery regardless of how unpopular it is under given political circumstances. On account of Palestinian problem and the case of the Furthest Mosque, the article draws heavily on conversation and debates took place with the Pakistani institutions of religious education. For two important reasons, article focuses it as a typical case of sacrificing truthful memory in the name of circumstances and the position taken by the Muslim Endowment Committee of Jerusalem on the question of the rights of custodianship of the Jews and the Jewish Relics and sites in Jerusalem merely echoes the religious opinions forged by the Indian religious scholarship in the early twentieth century and is no more than a replication this modified untruthful memory and its application to the political arena. While the Pakistani context did not allow for a widespread healing, given the absence of a Jewish community in Pakistan, it does offer hope that recovery of truthful historical memory as a considerable potential for improving Jewish-Muslim relations since the conceptual problems have often spilled over into situations of violence and extend to situations that involve national identity that is fed by religious identity.

Keywords: Palestinian problem, Furthest Mosque, Muslim Endowment Committee, rights of custodianship