

Empathy – the Way to Peace in the Holy Land

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Good Evening, Ladies and Gentlemen!

First of all, I want to express my gratitude to Professor Reinalter and the Global Ethic Institute for inviting me – and to Doctor Windischer, the Secretary General of Pax Christi, Austria, for presenting his perspective.

I feel honored for being invited to speak to you here in Innsbruck.

The Situation

The topic of peace in Israel/Palestine is emotionally highly charged – even here in Europe – because so many people are suffering!

Identification with the victims comes naturally and it is very important for the media!

For this reason, many people in nearly all Western countries have experienced a radical change in their sympathies.

After the cease-fire of 1949 the Israelis were seen as the victims. Their overwhelmingly powerful neighbors had tried, so it was said, to drive them into the sea – and they continued to threaten them after the armistice. Thus, at least here in Europe, people’s sympathies were clearly on the side of the Israelis when they, in 1967, conquered all of Palestine.

But thereafter, Israel proved unable to resolve the conflict. Continued threats did not allow them to arrive at a level of tranquility which they would have been needed for making peace. The surprise attack of the neighbors in 1973 on the highest Jewish holy day, Yom Kippur, clearly showed that Israel could not afford to relax.

Since then, it is the Palestinians, who have come increasingly to be seen as the victims. The wall and the checkpoints make them appear as prisoners of Israel. That has caused

the sympathies of many people in the Western world to switch in favor of the Palestinians.

People always tend to side with victims, a natural effect of compassion.

But taking sides does not lead to a solution. Quite the opposite. That way victims often turn into offenders, and offenders in turn become victims, sometimes in endless circles.

Thus, my question: what does it take to free both sides?

The basic requirement for peace is empathy, **compassion, for both sides**. Empathy means understanding what is motivating each party, the historical background, the ideological background, and the emotional background – also that of the third party, which is hardly ever mentioned, the Christians. They had become victims thirteen hundred years ago, when Jerusalem was conquered by the Muslims, and this was amplified, a thousand years ago, when their Holy Sepulcher was destroyed by Caliph al Hakim – but more on that later.

In order to escape the vicious victim-offender-circle, which is nurtured by the media, I invite you to accompany me on a virtual tour through the different aspects of the conflict.

At first the background to the founding of the State

The basic emotional background to the conflict is to be found mostly Muslim Palestinian side – and that is the reason for the vehemence of the rejection of Israel by its Muslim neighbors. This is rooted in the question of whether the Muslim *Umma*, the community of all Muslims, can allow the emergence of a State within their midst that rejects their way of life and which, above all, calls into question the rightfulness of one of their most holy sanctuaries, the Dome of the Rock and the al Aqsa mosque, because of Israel's mostly Jewish citizens' claim that this is the site where the Jewish Temple once stood.

This issue has been excluded from all political negotiations – as religious issues generally are excluded. But this amounts to ignoring, even denying, the most powerful motive behind the conflict. And as long as this remains the case, no one should be surprised that no solution is in sight.

This peace initiative does not attempt to circumvent the most pressing subject. Its approach is, on the contrary, to tackle it head on. Its purpose, then, is to transform the symbolic crux of the conflict, the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, the Noble Sanctuary of the Muslims, into a symbol of peace.



The Holy Sites in the Old City of Jerusalem¹

The emotional attention of both parties is spontaneously focused on the “Noble Sanctuary” of the Muslims, the Temple Mount of the Jews. If the conflict is to be resolved, this site, which has from the beginning been **the** major symbol of the conflict, must become a symbol of peace.

Five initial propositions

1. The religious dimension has no standing in current international law – and, consequently, also not in the political outlook of most people in the Western world.

Thus, in Western thinking, there is hardly any room for the considerations that follow. But Muslim thinking and feeling is quite different from the thinking and feeling of Westerners. For Muslims, but also for devout Jews, the religious dimension is very real! So, we had better pay attention to it:

2. For 1900 years, the Temple Mount was not in Jewish hands. But at least religious Jews have never felt indifferent about it. It has always been an essential part of their identity.
3. During the period of Muslim rule that was no problem – because Jews had no choice, they had to subordinate themselves under *Sharia* law. But today the situation is quite different. Today, Muslims feel threatened, because Jews are laying claim to the site of the Muslim “Noble Sanctuary”, saying it is their Temple

¹ Picture: © „Pictorial Library of Bible Lands“ vol. 3, www.bibleplaces.com

Mount; to Muslims that feels like a sword of Damocles, hanging over both their conception of themselves and their sanctuaries.

4. Generally, there was peace between religions within the realm of Islam for 1200 years. That peace was based on a provision of the *Sharia*, which requires that in Muslim territory all non-Muslims must subordinate themselves under the rule of Islam and accept the *dhimmi*-status, the status of protégés.

The State of the Jews refused to recognize that from the outset. The Muslim *Umma* therefore regarded it as an “alien entity”. Members of the *Umma* must therefore try to get rid of that alien element – just as an organism strives to rid itself of pathogens.

Under such circumstances - how could peace accomplished?

5. Surprisingly, the solution is to be found in the very name of the State, “Israel”, and thus in the Biblical story of the reconciliation between the brothers Jacob and Esau. If Israel were again to follow the example set by its Biblical prototype, the Qur’anic Sura 5,48 could supersede the *dhimmi*-rule of *sharia*: competition in virtue among the children of Abraham, instead of subordination. A letter of leading Muslims addressed to the Pope, “A Common Word” could help to introduce that change.

How did I become involved in this?

My first contact was provided by my high school more than fifty years ago. In 1963, before graduating, I presented a paper about the Prophet Mohammed. And right after that our class went on a seven-week journey to Egypt.

Upon returning I studied Catholic theology and after attaining my degree I studied history and political science.

Then I moved to the US, and stayed in San Francisco for nearly five years. There I realized in very intense spiritual experiences made me understand that, basically, all religions are one.

I put that down in writing, but did not find a publisher for my manuscript. Thus, I hoped that my insights would be confirmed by a living spiritual master. I thought of a Hindu master, but I ended up in the spiritual tradition of Islam and spent a full year in a Sufi community in Cairo – and got to know Islam quite well from a trustworthy source.

After my insights had indeed been confirmed, I moved to Munich, taught Catholic religion to kids in school and continued to study very basic forms of spirituality of indigenous people but also of the contemporary expressions of traditional religions.

This led me into contact with the mysticism of Judaism, and I realized that Judaism had not lost any of its vitality and significance.

This realization also provided me with a deeper understanding of Christianity.

I became a psychotherapist and started to work in a psychiatric institution. There, I published my first book – my personal concept of psychotherapy, “Resurrection – Before Death. Using Biblical Texts in Psychotherapy” [in German: “Auferstehung – vor dem Tod. Therapeutisch arbeiten mit biblischen Texten“], published by Kösel in Munich in 1994.

Then came

September 11, 2001

To me that was a real shock. The kind of Islam I had experienced was very different from that terror.

The Sufis had confirmed my insight into the underlying unity of all religions.

One of the essential sentences of the founder of this particular Sufi order was: “There is only one true religion – and it is not the religion known by the name ‘Islam’”. If he had been Christian, he would have said “... and it is not the one named Christianity”. “But,” he continued, “it is ‘Islam’ in its literal sense, meaning “peace through subordination under God.” And he went on to explain that this concerns not membership of any religious group awareness of the origin and the destination of life. And that, I knew, has been the insight of the mystics of all religions at all times.

But many Muslims believe (and so do many Christians) that their brand name religion is superior to all others and will one day supersede all other forms of religion.

Such a belief leads radical Muslims – like Al Qaeda – to deduce that they are entitled to global dominance. With such a rationale, they justified the attack against “the infidels”, their World Trade Center and their Pentagon; and this is the rationale used to justify all religiously motivated terror attacks, up to and including the terror exercised by the so-called “Islamic State”.

One of the personal consequences for me was the urge to transform the site of today’s most profound inter-religious conflict – which is in my view is “al Haram ash Sharif” versus “the Temple Mount” in Jerusalem – into a symbol of peace.

How?

Each of the three great Abrahamic religions has one main sanctuary in Jerusalem – except for the Jews, who gave rise to both Christianity and Islam. Thus, peace clearly demands that the Jews too – at least in the hearts of the people who adhere to one of

the religions based on Abraham – should be provided with the opportunity to rebuild their great sanctuary, the Temple.

Why has peace not returned to the Holy Land a long time ago?

For about 1800 years Jews have been practically excluded from the emotional center of their Holy Land, the site of their ancient Temple in Jerusalem.

In the 18th century, perhaps in some way connected with American independence, the idea of a new homeland for the Jews began to take shape. Simultaneously reimmigration started.

The territorial sovereign of that time, the Turkish Sultan, immediately realized the danger that development posed for the Muslim *Umma*, the community of all Muslims, and for the Muslim sanctuaries in Jerusalem, a danger that would become very urgent if Jews were again to regard that land as their homeland. After all, for almost 2000 years religious Jews have been praying for a New Temple three times a day. In view of all that he prohibited the sale of land to Jews.

But what motivated most of the first Zionists to immigrate was not the idea of a New Temple. They primarily wanted more than anything else to settle in a place they could identify with and which gave them protection from persecution.

The League of Nations, which was set up after WW I, understood this. So, it mandated the British in 1922 to prepare a Jewish homeland in Palestine. The Holocaust made this inescapable – so the UN decided in 1947 to divide the country and to leave one part to the Jews.

After that events began to happen in a rush.

The Muslim neighbors could not accept that UN dictate. To host in their midst what would clearly be an alien entity was entirely inconceivable to them. They started to fight against it.

And the Zionists, who just had escaped the Holocaust, struggled desperately to get control over as much territory as possible – even if that meant forced displacement of Arab Palestinians. That, in the end, caused 750.000 Palestinian to leave their homes and flee and finally led to what the Palestinians today are calling the “Naqba”, the catastrophe.

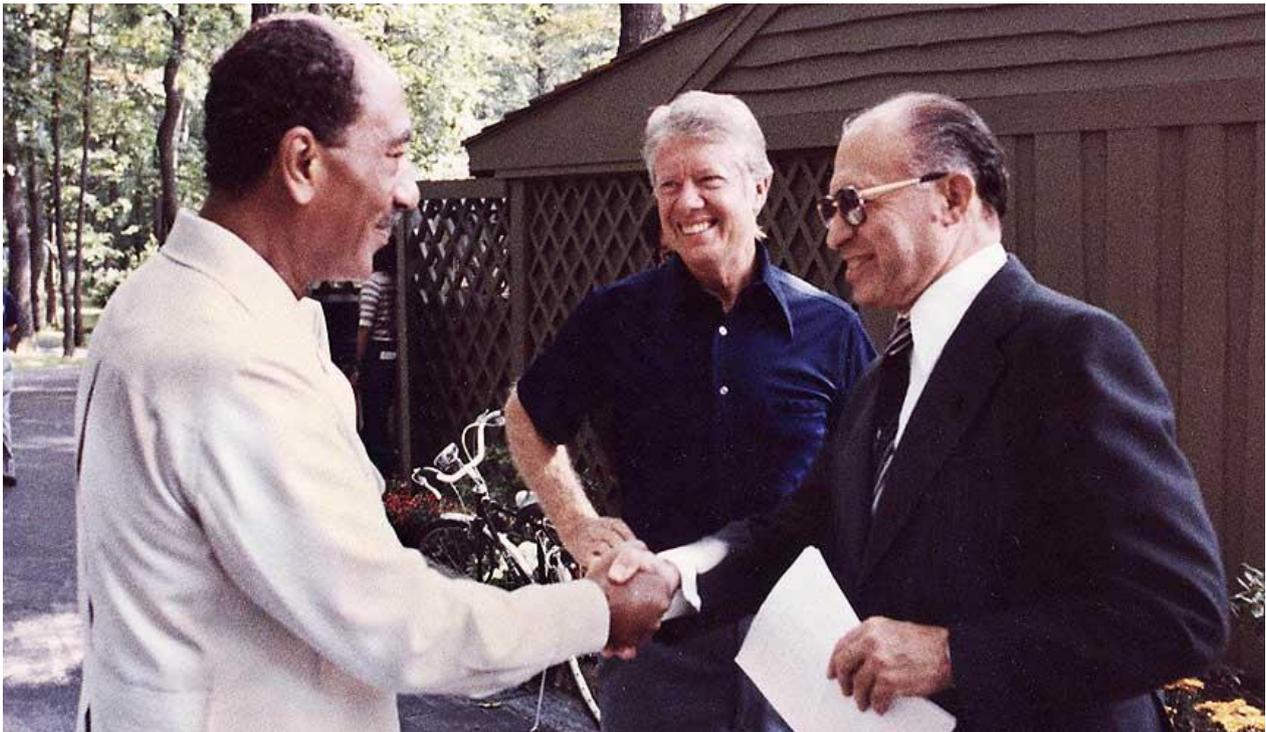
In the midst of all this, in May of 1948, the State of Israel was founded.

The war was ended one year later by an armistice. The result was not a Palestinian State, but Jordan controlled most of the territory of the Palestinian partition by the UN, as well as most of Jerusalem including the traditional Jewish quarter. This situation was quite unsatisfactory for both Jews and Muslims, the latter having failed to eliminate the Zionist entity.

The conflict continued to smolder, from time to time bursting into flames again, as in the Suez-crisis of 1956, and this in the end led up the 6-day war of 1967 and Israeli occupation of the entire territory of Palestine.

That, of course, could not solve the conflict. The Arab neighbors looked for an opportunity to retaliate. And in 1973 mainly the Egyptians and Syrians in particular, saw a chance. They launched a surprise attack against Israel on the highest Jewish holy day, Yom Kippur. They did not succeed.

But in 1978 the American President Jimmy Carter was able to motivate President Sadat of Egypt to make peace with Israel.



Anwar al Sadat, Jimmy Carter, Menachem Begin, 1978 in Camp David²

Please look at the facial expressions on this and the following picture – how relaxed they are on this one.

Fifteen years later US-President Bill Clinton wanted to step into the footsteps of his predecessor Jimmy Carter. He wanted to achieve peace between Israel and the Palestinians.

1993 Oslo

Clinton suggested that Israel, in exchange for peace, should renounce their claim to the Temple Mount and be satisfied with the “status quo”. Rabin accepted.

² http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Camp_David,_Menachem_Begin,_Anwar_Sadat,_1978.jpg

The difference in spirit between both of these agreements you can see on the faces:

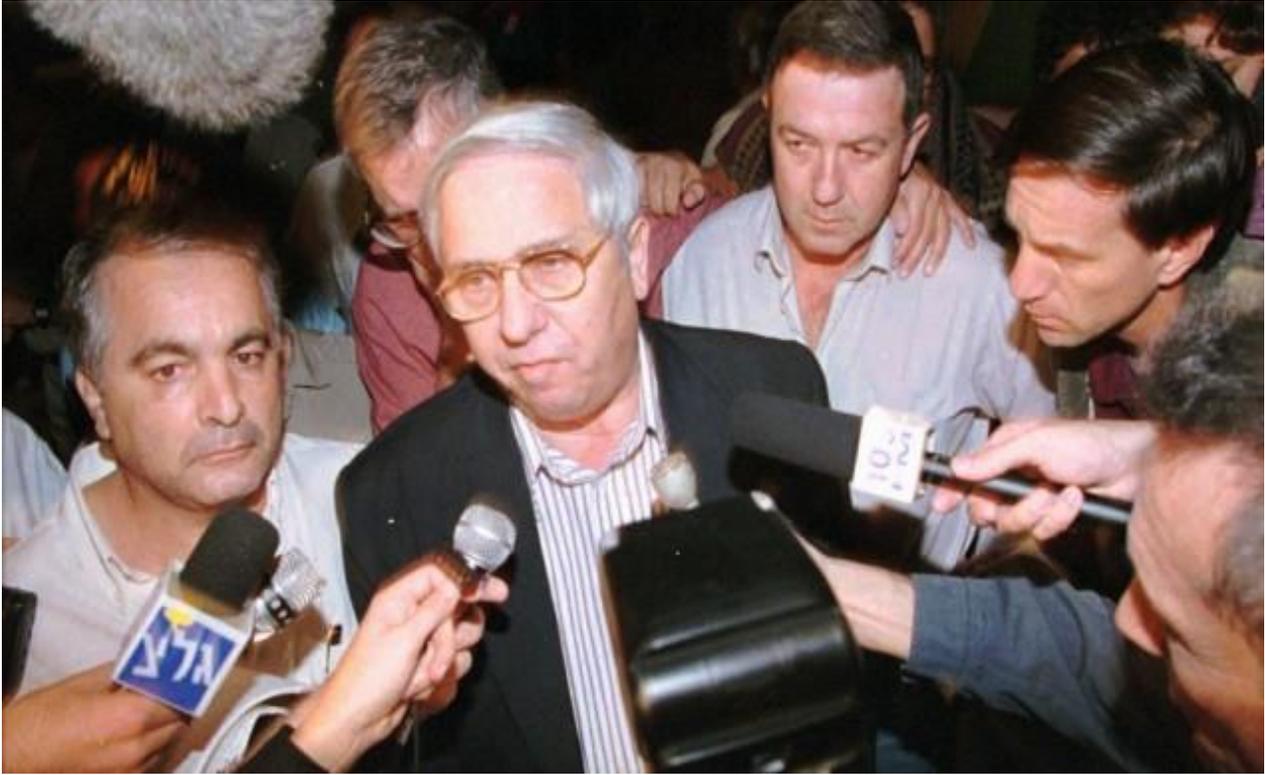


Yitzhak Rabin, Bill Clinton, Yasser Arafat, 1993, in the White House³

To many Israelis today Rabin is some sort of a saint, as far as peace is concerned, but in the eyes of many of the religious Israelis, he had conceded too much in Oslo.

Neither Clinton nor Rabin had been able to appreciate sufficiently the symbolic significance of the Temple Mount – even for secular Jews – sufficiently. Their sincere effort has to be acknowledged, but the prayers of 2000 years cannot be ignored. Not least for that reason Rabin was murdered.

³ photo: Reuters / Gary Hershorn



Eitan Haber announcing the death of Rabin⁴

But that was not the end of the matter. Someone had to clarify Israel's relation with the Temple Mount.

And in the year 2000, after Clinton's new summit at Camp David had failed, Ariel Sharon, Israel's opposition leader, ostentatiously went up onto the Temple Mount.

Sharon on the Temple Mount

⁴ AP Photo: Eyal Warshavsky



Sharon on the Temple Mount⁵

– fully aware of the meaning of the site for both the Muslims and the Jews, and fully aware of the provocation his visit meant to the Muslims. That, the following year got him the office of the Prime Minister – but before that **the second Intifada** began, renewed armed resistance of the Palestinians against Israel.

Nobody but the Muslims can claim any rights to that site, they said; it was solely their “Noble Sanctuary”, they said.

Exactly that the late Shaykh of the Al Azhar University in Cairo, Dr. Muhammad Sayyid Tantawi, the highest religious authority in Sunni Islam, asserted in a personal letter to me.

But in Israel a new wave of deadly violence began.

One consequence of the Intifada: the wall

The Second Intifada left many people dead or mutilated. As a reaction to this new wave of violence, Sharon started to put up a wall, which today isolates all of Palestine and even cuts off some of the villages from their environment.

⁵ Photo credit: Flash 90



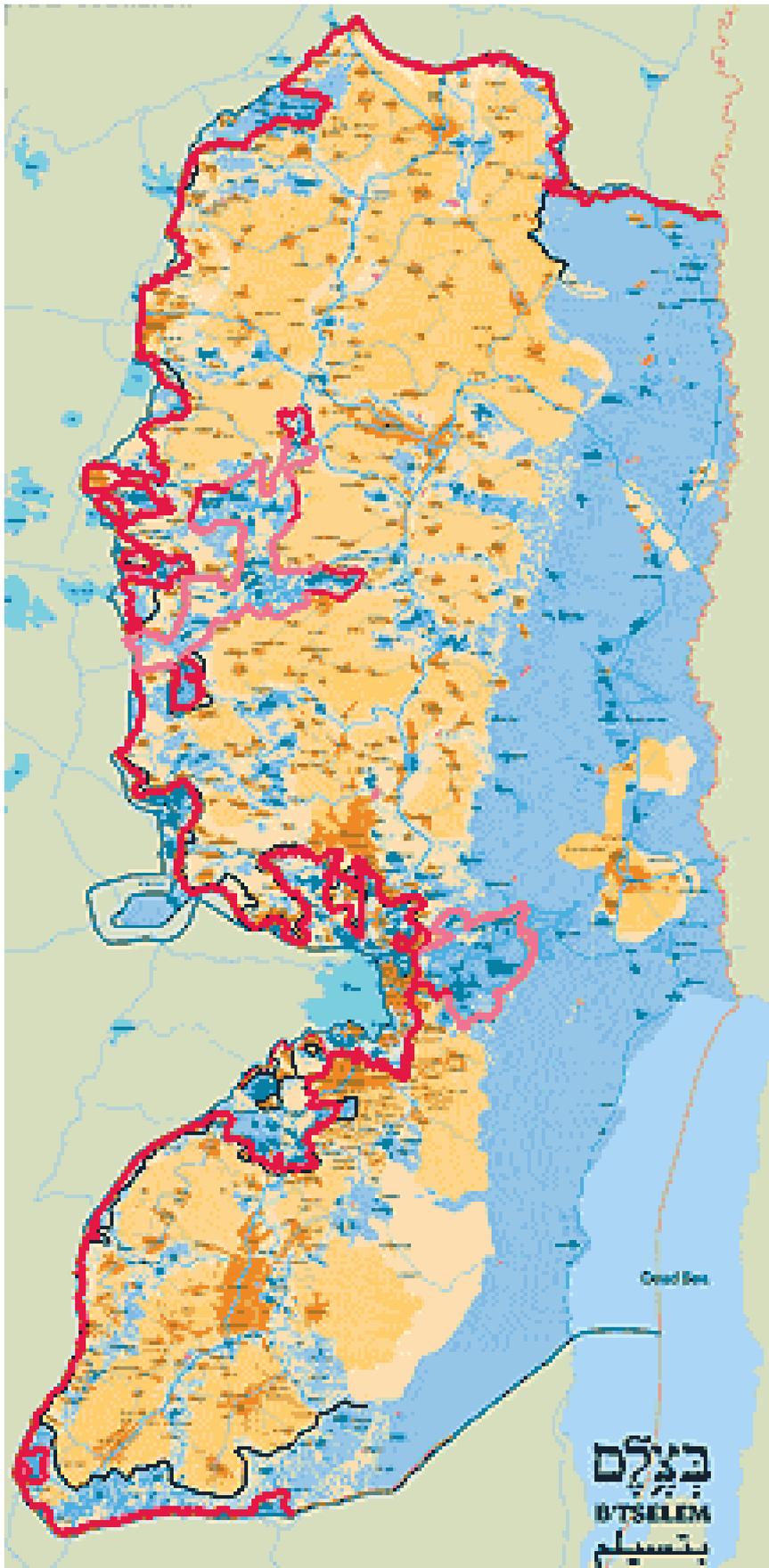
„An ultra-orthodox Jew in Bethlehem in the West Bank running along the Israeli separation barrier towards the tomb of Rachel“⁶

The route of the wall

From a religious perspective, the wall is a consequence of disregarding the meaning of the Temple Mount.

It was mostly built on Palestinian land, inside the borders of the West Bank; it isolates areas considered dangerous without any concern for the people living there.

⁶ picture and caption: <http://www.fr-online.de/panorama,1472782,10840506.html>



The source of the map⁷

⁷ <http://www.vtjp.org/background/wallgraphics.htm>

What is the religions' share in the dispute?

Sharon's demonstration showed: Muslims and Jews claim ownership of one and the same holy site.

Muslims are in possession of the site.

They trace their claim back to the famous "Night Journey" of their Prophet Mohammed, because the archangel Gabriel took him to that site and from there he raised him up to the heavens where he met with all the prophets who had come before him and where he received instructions for Muslim prayer.

To Jews this is the site of their first and second Temples – and many Jews long to have a New Temple there.

To Christians the site is essential in the life and work of Jesus and also of the Apostles.

But Muslims are not willing to share the place.

Thus, the site has become a symbol of conflict. – And much of the strife seems to arise from the question of who is superior to whom?

In my view, the essence of religion, no matter if Jewish, Christian or Muslims, is **love**. Religion demands compassion. From this we may get a hunch of how this symbol of conflict could be turned into a symbol of peace!

The situation cries for reconciliation – and reconciliation is attainable, as we shall see.

But – before we contemplate the preconditions for reconciliation, for a start by viewing the historical background – please take another look at the holy sites in Jerusalem:

The Holy Sites in Jerusalem in between the Temple Mount, al Haram ash Sharif, and the Holy Sepulcher

Below you are viewing the significant sites, the Dome of the Rock (1), the Al Aqsa Mosque (2), the Wailing Wall (3), the Holy Sepulcher (4) ⁸

⁸ ©"Pictorial Library of Bible Lands", Bd. 3, www.bibleplaces.com



↑(1) ↑(2) ↑(3)

↑ (4)

A brief history of the Temple Mount

Official representatives of religion had a share in creating conflict throughout history – at least since the days of the Prophet Jeremiah.

About **3000 years ago**, King Solomon built the first Temple – as a place where God’s presence could be felt in an extraordinary manner, but also as a political symbol of Israel’s new status of being able to provide safety for the Israelites in their Promised Land. But this ideal condition did not last very long, because Solomon’s successors soon separated the Northern part of the country, Samaria, from the land of the Temple.

About **600 B.C.E.** the Babylonians were approaching, intent on either winning an ally or conquering the country. The Prophet Jeremiah tried desperately to convince his King Zedekiah to make peace with Nebuchadnezzar. But, with slogans like “the Temple of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord, are these”⁹, the national religious party prevailed. Jeremiah was defeated. He was thrown into prison. The King did not attempt to make peace. Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem. He destroyed the Temple and he took the upper-class Israelites to Babylon in captivity.

But fortunes changed. The Persians conquered Babylon. They needed Israel as a bulwark towards Egypt. Thus, they allowed the Israelites to return from Babylon. They

⁹ Jeremiah 7,4

even financed a Second Temple – which, in splendor, could not compare with the Temple of Salomon.

500 years later, King Herod took the opportunity to make himself a name by embellishing the Temple on a grand scale. This time the Romans helped. They wanted to see their friend Herod in power. This was the Temple Jesus saw.

In opposition to the policy of the priests, who accepted the major power and cooperated with the religiously liberal Romans, national-religious groups, the Zealots, increasingly organized uprisings, which, in turn, provoked increasing suppression by the Romans. The tensions escalated and led to the first Jewish war in which, in the year **70 C.E.**, the Temple was destroyed. But even that catastrophe could not stop the uprisings; decades later they were again fully inflamed in the Messianic movement around Bar Kokhba. But that too was crushed – and this time for good.

In the year **135 C.E.** the **Emperor Hadrian** destroyed what was left of Jewish Palestine. Nine hundred villages were razed to the ground. Some of the survivors fled to Galilee, others to relatives in the diaspora.

Hadrian decreed that no Jew must ever again enter that land (Judea). His edict remained in force until the Muslims conquered the land in the year 638 C.E. But thenceforth it was the Muslims who were interested in keeping Jews away in order to protect their sanctuaries on the Temple Mount.

Three hundred years earlier Christianity had reached influence on a scale that motivated the Emperor Constantine to make it **the official religion of the Empire.**

The Emperor's mother, **Helena went to Jerusalem** in search of the traces of Jesus. She found the grave and the cross. Over the grave, she had the **Holy Sepulcher** built. Two ship-loads of soil from Golgotha she sent to Rome. On top of that soil, Santa Croce was built.

Helena also found the birthplace of Jesus in Bethlehem. Like the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem she had the **Nativity Church built in Bethlehem.**

The Roman Temples in Jerusalem were demolished – and, demonstratively, the site was left as a field of rubble.

In **363 C.E.** Constantin's successor, the **Emperor Julian**, attempted to go back to the Roman cult of gods. In his **attempt at de-Christianization** he also wanted to re-erect the Jewish Temple. But in that very year he died on the battlefield.

In **530** C.E. the Emperor Justinian had a **church of St. Mary built** at the southern end of the Temple Mount. After an earthquake in the 1927 its mosaics were found under the floor of the Al Aqsa Mosque.¹⁰

In **614** C.E. influential Jews at the **Persian** court succeeded in motivating the King to organize a **military campaign against the Byzantines** aiming at gaining control over their ancient Holy Land and of reconstructing their Temple in Jerusalem. The campaign was successful. Jerusalem was conquered. The Christians were disempowered. The Holy Sepulcher and St. Mary's church were destroyed, but there was not enough time to rebuild the Temple, because already in **617**, the Jewish party lost its influence at the Persian court. The campaign had been too expensive and not in Persia's main sphere of interest. Jews were removed from all influential positions, also in Palestine. **The Christians were rehabilitated.**

And only 12 years later, in **629**, the **Byzantines** were able to **reconquer Palestine**. But they were already considerably weakened. Nine years later they were unable to offer any resistance against the onrush of the Muslim armies.

In **638** the **Caliph Omar** was able to take Syria and Palestine almost without a fight. In Jerusalem, he asked the Christian Patriarch Sophronius to show him the spot to which the Archangel Gabriel had taken the Prophet Mohammed in his **Night Journey** – it was the very spot where Jews every ninth of Av anointed the foundation stone of their former Temple.

Since the Christians had left the ruins of the destroyed Roman temples unattended, Omar's people first cleaned the site; then he had a small **wooden memorial** built on the site of today's Dome of the Rock.

A few years ago, a Turkish government representative for Islam in Germany surprised me by saying that Caliph Omar's treatment of the Temple Mount had not been correct. Correctness in the spirit of Islam would have demanded that the site be handed over to representatives of Judaism.

But I, as a Christian, also need to question the role of the Christians in that matter. Their lack of respect for the Jewish Temple had left the site unattended; that created the need for the Caliph to clean up – because the Caliph Omar did have proper respect for the site! Had the Christians cherished the respect Jesus had, they would have built their own sanctuary in memory of the Temple just as they built the Holy Sepulcher. Had they done that, history might have taken a quite different course – with regard to today's

¹⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Aqsa_Mosque: "[Emperor Justinian](#) built a Christian church on the site in the 530s which was consecrated to the [Virgin Mary](#) and named "Church of Our Lady." The church was later destroyed by [Khosrau II](#), the [Sassanid emperor](#), in the early 7th century and left in ruins.^[2] = [7 'Jerusalem \(A.D. 71-1099\)'](#). *Catholic Encyclopedia*. [Archived](#) from the original on 6 July 2008. Retrieved 1 July 2008."

conflict over the Temple Mount, because with a Christian sanctuary at the site, the Christians would have also had a say in the development of the Temple Mount.

But it is as it is.

In **691 Caliph Abd al Malik built the Dome of the Rock, and**, on the site of the church of St. Mary, he built **the Al Aqsa Mosque**.¹¹

A similar course was taken seventeen years later in Damascus, when, in **708**, the cathedral of St. Joannis was torn down to be replaced by the **Mosque of the Umayyads**; only the grave of St. Joannis was left untouched; it was integrated into the mosque.

Three hundred years later, in **1009, the Caliph Al Hakim even had the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem destroyed, including the grave of Jesus**. His mother, so it is said, was Christian, and he hated her. He killed many Christians, destroyed many churches, and he **blocked Christian pilgrimage to the Holy Land**.

That brought about the crusades.

To organize the crusades, however, took nearly one hundred years because the Pope in Rome was in the middle of the Investiture Controversy with the Emperor and in the process of splitting with Byzantium.

But, finally, in **1099, Jerusalem was conquered by the crusaders** – in a bloodbath. The crusaders ruled the Holy Land for eighty-eight years.

In **1187 Saladin reconquered Jerusalem**, in **1229 the Franks** returned, in **1244 the Turks** came, in **1260 the Mongols** (the Mamelukes) and, **finally, in 1516, the Ottomans**. They ruled for four hundred years over the major part of the Middle East up until World War I.

¹¹ Mikveh and Byzantine mosaics discovered under the Al Aqsa Mosque, in Israel Hayom 12_06_29, http://www.israelhayom.com/site/newsletter_article.php?id=4890: “About half a meter (1.5 feet) under the floor of the damaged mosque, Hamilton discovered the remains of a Byzantine mosaic. When Dvira saw the photographs of it, he immediately recalled hundreds of thousands of mosaic stones and fragments of column capitals, marble used to cover stalls, and marble used for the grating of a church, all from the Byzantine period (324-638 C.E.) that had been found amid the earth taken from the Temple Mount.

These findings have brought about an important revolution in the way we view the history of that period. They suggest that contrary to everything that has been written in the history books, the Temple Mount contained structures — a church or churches — during the Byzantine period. It was not empty and desolate, as was believed until now.”

The Temple Mount today

Since 1967 Israel has laid claim to ownership of the Temple Mount. The *Waqf*, the Muslim endowment, ignores this claim. It is treating the Temple Mount – in their view their “Noble Sanctuary”, “al Haram ash Sharif” with its Dome of the Rock and the Al Aqsa Mosque, as their sole property. This they showed demonstratively when they, in 1996, they began to excavate the “Stables of Solomon” and to turn them into an underground mosque. The dug-out material they carelessly unloaded onto a refuse dump.

In order to fend off Jewish claims representatives of the Waqf are even claiming that there never had been a Jewish Temple in Jerusalem. The importance of the site related only to the Prophet’s Night Journey.

In addition to this, every Israeli intervention, such as repairs to the ascendancy ramp, triggered most heavy protests.

Sharon’s visit to the Temple Mount in 2000 posed an unprecedented affront. – Although the Second Intifada had already been planned, it was totally plausible to justify it with that.

The power of symbolism

The Temple Mount is like the tip of an iceberg

What does the Temple Mount mean for the Jews?

Maimonides mentions a synagogue there, but most of the time Jews were excluded from the Temple Mount. Jews (just as Christians) had to live as *dhimmis*, protégés, clearly subordinated under the religion of Islam. And the Temple Mount was now a solely Muslim sanctuary.

For the Jews of the modern State of Israel a *dhimmi*-status is not acceptable, because now that they are living **in their own State**, nobody can dominate them there.

In order to emphasize that, Israel in 1967 declared the Temple Mount to be theirs.

This was to say that in the dimension of religion Jews held the earlier rights.

And this part of Jewish identity is important even for entirely secular Jews. To his own surprise Menachem Magidor, a declared atheist, realized that during a historical commemoration he had to chair as the president of Hebrew University.¹²

¹² [Menachem Magidor, The Temple Mount – a Personal Account, in: Oleg Grabbar, Benjamin Z. Kedar (Eds.): Where Heaven and Earth Meet, Jerusalem, 2009, pp. 362-365]

An entirely different matter is the question of who would even want to have a New Temple.

Immediately after the shock of the year 70 C.E. a new movement arose in Judaism, of Jews who saw the destruction of the Temple as a divine revelation. The new situation, they said, had to be regarded as permanent. Something else had to replace the sacrifices in the Temple. At the sight of the ruins of the Temple Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai, the founder of the house of learning in Yavneh said: “there is one atonement like that [in the Temple, namely by] ... performing good deeds.”¹³

Here, apparently, are the origins of today’s Reform Judaism, which clearly opposes a New Temple.

The Chief Rabbinate on the other hand, points out that the Messiah will bring the New Temple.

According to both of these accounts the Muslim sanctuaries on the Temple Mount would be safe – but Muslims have no confidence in statements issued by the Chief Rabbinate. Thus, they live in constant fear for their sanctuaries.

And not without reason, because ultra-orthodox Jews would like to have a New Temple as soon as possible – and their influence is steadily increasing.

Besides that, a representative poll of the year 2009 among Israeli Jews revealed that an astounding 64 % of all Israeli Jews, seculars included, want to have a New Temple now.¹⁴

But only the orthodox would like to renew the sacrifice-cult of the Temple which was destroyed by the Romans.

Two traumatized parties and one suitable therapeutic method: empathy

In 2011 the Munich Hanns Seidel Foundation thematized this peace initiative in a conference it hosted. I was invited to speak about it from a psychotherapeutic view: “Two traumatized parties and one suitable therapy, empathy.”¹⁵

¹³ http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jochanan_ben_Sakkai, Citation from: Werner H. Ritter, Erlösung ohne Opfer, BThS 22, 2003, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, p. 120.

¹⁴ 516 people were interviewed between July 27. to 29., 2009, all above the age of eighteen and representing a cross-section of Jewish society. The poll was done by „Panel4all“. All questions presented pertained to a New Temple in Jerusalem. The maximum error rate was ±4,3%.

¹⁵ In German language:

http://www.google.de/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&frm=1&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CC4QFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.hss.de%2Ffileadmin%2Fmedia%2Fdownloads%2FBerichte%2F110921_RM

The conflict, I said, seems intractable, because both parties are traumatized and therefore extremely vulnerable. Before traumatized people could find a solution they would need compassion.

Jews are traumatized after ever renewed persecutions in the Christian West. On account of these persecutions a new homeland for the Jews became indispensable.

But Muslims, too, are traumatized. Muslims, too, need compassion.

Feeling compassion for Muslims means first to feel the excitement that led to the rapid expansion of Islam, from Spain to China.

It means, feeling how the absolute certainty of victory can at times culminate in cockiness – as in the mood that led to the destruction of the Holy Sepulcher.

But after many centuries of Islamic expansion, the certainty of victory faded. Muslims fell behind. And that experience was traumatizing.

As if to demonstrate this, an alien element was implanted into the main territory of the Muslim *umma*: Israel. And that alien entity even dared to question the Muslim sanctuaries at the Temple Mount – not to speak of displacement and expropriation of Palestinians.

Compassion for the Muslims means to feel all that.

It means to feel how all attempts to shake off that alien entity failed – up to the Second Intifada, which only produced a gigantic wall, one that gives the Palestinians the feeling of being prisoners.

Compassion for the Jews means to feel what it means to live for 1800 years in exile, what it means to be forcefully excluded from one's homeland, what it means to lose the great and most holy sanctuary, the Temple.

Compassion for the Jews means to feel what it means to be an oppressed minority, what it means to get persecuted, tortured and killed, for no other reason than belonging to that minority, to get.

And compassion means to feel what it means for the Jews, under these circumstances, to be offered a fresh start in part of the ancient Biblical homeland.

And it means to feel what it can mean to be given the chance to have the grand old sanctuary, the Temple, rebuilt, and thus to win back the symbolic expression of regained wholeness.

And it means to feel what it is like when religious competitors, the Muslims, are sparing no effort to prevent just that.

Thus, feeling compassion for the Jews also means to feel how an ancient feud between brothers is rekindled.

Who is superior to whom? Does it take war to establish that?

The Qur'an has a different solution. **Sura 5,48** speaks of a competition between the children of Abraham and suggests this should be a competition in virtue. **This means empathy!**

The Bible, on the other hand, presents a solution to a feud between brothers which seems to be tailored to fit today's situation.¹⁶

The feud between the brothers Esau and Jacob – the solution is spelled “Israel”

Jacob defrauded his brother Esau of the blessings of their father. That meant death. Jacob had to flee. For more than two decades he stayed in exile. When he returned, his brother came towards him with four hundred armed men.

A situation similar to the one Israel faced in in the war of 1947/48! – The tiny, still barely formed Israel confronted by an overwhelming majority of its neighbors!

But Jacob solved the problem and he accomplished reconciliation. As a divine acknowledgement, he received the name “Israel”, meaning “the one who fought against God and prevailed.”

Today's Israel has not yet found a solution.

Jacob also had a generous present for his host. Theodor Herzl, the spokesperson of the Zionists, too, had a generous present for his host. In exchange for the Turkish Sultan's permission for Jews to resettle in their ancient homeland he offered to help recapitalize the Sultan's State's finances. But the Sultan turned him down. What was missing in Herzl's offer? The apology!

The apology was the main element in Jacob's reconciliation. Emblematically, it dislocated Jacob's hip – enabling us to feel how hard it was for him. But only that hardship, expressed in his prostrating himself before his brother, had the power to move Esau to forget his armed men. Instead, he reached down, lifted his brother to his feet and embraced him.

On that account, Jacob was given the name “Israel”.

¹⁶ Genesis 32f.

The parallels to today's Middle East conflict are striking: Modern Jews, too, returned from their exile – into the heart-land of their Muslim kinsmen. From a Muslim point of view, they came as intruders who breached the integrity of the *umma*. They invalidated the laws of *sharia* within Muslim main territory.

This was the reason for the war – not any shortage of territory.

Jacob, too, would have been confronted by war, had he not deployed all his strength to the utmost to avoid that war.

Jacob needed reconciliation. Modern Israel, too, needs reconciliation. And today, reconciliation is possible. Before, it would not have been possible, because the trauma was still too heavy.

But today, Jews can remember their father “Israel”, and they can apologize to their Muslim tribal kinsmen – for their basically innocent intrusion into the holy space of the *umma*.

But, in order for them to break through their limits and to find right gesture, they may need a gesture of goodwill from their Muslim kinsmen, like the step I am about to describe in a minute.

Following their apology Israel could deliver its generous present. They could – for example – pledge to deliver the Palestinians the same quantity of water they themselves are using per capita, produced by the gigantic Israeli desalination plants.

Together these two grand gestures, the apology and the gift, would override the *dhimmi*-rule and would allow the Muslims to replace that rule by the Qur'anic command of Sura 5,48, which asks for a “competition in virtue” between all children of Abraham.

The intermediary step I spoke of a minute ago, the Muslims have already taken towards the Christians.

A letter of leading Muslims addressed to the Pope and other Christian leaders: “A Common Word between Us and You”

This letter was originally intended as a response to Pope Benedict XVI's speech in Regensburg, when he had reiterated a question by the Byzantine Emperor, asking what was new in the teachings of the Prophet Mohammed – besides spreading the religion by means of the sword. Benedict's speech infuriated many Muslims, but some of the most respected leaders issued a surprising response – they endorsed a letter of the Jordanian Prince Ghazi who suggested to make the one word Christians and Muslims have in common, “love”, the basis of their inter-religious dialogue.

That suggestion motivated the Munich “Eugen Biser Foundation” to award Prince Ghazi, the main author of the letter, with the 2007 prize of the foundation.

So far, that special letter has not been sent to Israel’s Chief Rabbinate. But peace demands that the Rabbis be included. The “One Common Word” would remind them of “Israel” and his way of reconciliation.

My personal conversation with Prinz Ghazi was not encouraging, however. The Prince only confirmed what the Sheikh of Al Azhar had already told me, that, from a Muslim point of view, a sanctuary cannot be shared – especially not the Al Aqsa.

A more promising conversation I had with the deputy of the Jordanian Minister of Awqaf, Dr. Muhammad Ro’ud, the top-level custodian of the Al Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, the mosque of the Temple Mount.

During my visit in May 2013 I asked him to act for peace by suggesting reediting the letter “A Common Word” and sending it to leading Rabbis – thus, recommending empathy also for the Jews.

In response, the deputy invited me to take part in the 2014 inter-religious week of the Ministry.

Professor Kamel Abu Jaber, who served as the Jordanian Minister of Foreign Affairs, when Jordan made peace with Israel, and in 2013 headed the Royal Jordanian Institute for Interfaith Studies, assured me that he would personally advocate a new edition of the letter and sending it out in appropriate form to leading Rabbis.

Naturally, such a letter would, among the various groups of Jews, generate a new and earnest search for the appropriate symbol of Jewish integrity.

And in that search Jews will need much compassion for each other.

What could an inter-religious solution look like?

Empathy creates space in our hearts and in our heads for the wishes and longings of others, be they Jews, Christians or Muslims.

Empathy also enables us to recognize the pride, the arrogance, which we usually perceive only in others, in ourselves too, and thus it enables us to overcome these habits. Then, true dialogue will be possible!

The next step is to get closer to love, to see the needs of the others, first to enable them to see their traumas, then to see what they need to get over them.

Once love is present and a willingness to make sacrifices, we can ask ourselves what it takes to attain a state of satisfaction. What has been missing until now will then have our permission to develop. The necessary space will emerge – at least in our minds, but possibly also in reality – even for the long longed-for and prayed-for Jewish Temple.

As a first step the site of the Noble Sanctuary could be shared. The Knesset has already received proposals for such a bill.¹⁷

But, the space created by empathy will most likely also lead to advanced forms of our wishes. And that will be true for all parties – even the ultra-orthodox.

The newly evolved, transformed wishes will then have the potential to materialize – but now in a form that is fitting for both and not just as a continuation of wishes of the past.

And the outcome will be – within Judaism and within each of the Abrahamic religions: unity in diversity.

An Outlook

A Egyptian-German Imam told me that after the grand apology of which I have spoken “the Noble Sanctuary” could be made accessible for Jews and usable also for Jewish rituals.

“If it really should be necessary,” he said, “even a Temple could be built there.” And he told me of a precedent. The Prophet himself shared his mosque in Medina with a Christian delegation. He even allowed them to celebrate their mass inside it.¹⁸

The example of the Prophet created a paradigm, one that queries the statements of both the Sheikh of Al Azhar and of Prince Ghazi of Jordan.

The Egyptian Imam also named a second precedent: a celebration of the Muslim Eid Al Adha in the Cologne Cathedral. In 1965 the Archbishop of Cologne, Cardinal Frings allowed Muslims to use his cathedral for their prayers and celebrations:

Muslims celebrating Eid Al Adha in the Cathedral of Cologne¹⁹

¹⁷ <http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/158745>

¹⁸ AlBidaya Wal Nihaya, Ibn Kathheer, Bd 3, S 51:

له : ما صنع بنا هؤلاء القوم شرفونا ومولونا وخدمونا وقد أبو الا خلافه ، ولو فعلت نزعوا منا كل ما ترى قال فاضمر عليها منه أخوه كرز حتى أسلم بعد ذلك . وذكر ابن اسحاق أنهم لما دخلوا المسجد النبوي دخلوا في تجمل وثياب حسان وقد حانت صلاة العصر فقاموا يصلون الى المشرق . فقال رسول الله ﷺ دعوهم فكان المتكلم لهم أبا حارثة بن علقمة والسيد والعاقب حتى نزل فيهم صدر من سورة آل عمران والمباهلة فابوا ذلك وسألوا أن يرسل معهم أمينا فبعث معهم أبا عبيدة بن الجراح كما

¹⁹ <http://www.express.de/koeln/mit-religionsexperte-becker--express-von-1965-im-zdf,2856,4764630.html>



**Mohammedaner
beten im Dom**

What a contrast with Sharon's visit to the Temple Mount!

And now, please take another look at the holy sites in Jerusalem, keeping in mind the shared use of "the Noble Sanctuary".

Please look once again the site which will radiate peace into the world, once the Jewish longing for a central Jewish sanctuary is permitted to take concrete shape²⁰



Thank you very much for your attention!