



Shima | שִׁמָּה
S H M A . C O M

seven-room house, about 100 meters from the Western Wall, was home to 15 people, including his mother, brothers, wife and children. The house was white stone and about 250 years old, he said. After the demolition, the refugees dispersed to other locales in the Jerusalem area and to Jordan and Morocco.

On the night of June 10, 1967 — just as Israel was consolidating its seemingly miraculous victory over Egypt, Jordan, Syria, and other Arab armies — Israeli bulldozers began demolishing the Palestinian houses closest to the Western Wall. “We thought they were going to make a road, to broaden a road to the Western Wall,” Mawalid said. He did not at first imagine that his entire neighborhood would be razed.

One person, Rasmiya Abu Aghayl, a woman in her 50s, was killed when a bulldozer demolished her house while she was still in it.

Lt. Col. Ya’akov Salman, the deputy military governor who commanded the demolition, told the Israeli daily newspaper *Haaretz* that Palestinian residents initially refused to depart. Salman ordered an officer to begin the demolitions

nevertheless. “The order to evacuate the neighborhood was one of the hardest in my life,” he said, according to the book *The Accidental Empire: Israel and the Birth of the Settlements, 1967-1977*, by Israeli journalist Gershom Gorenberg. “When you order, ‘Fire!’ [in battle], you’re an automaton. Here you had to give an order knowing you are likely to hurt innocent people.”

Amir Cheshin, who served as adviser on East Jerusalem to Mayor Teddy Kollek during the 1980s, believes that the decision to demolish the quarter was correct: “In retrospect, it was a smart act. Otherwise, the Kotel would have remained a miserable alley. If they didn’t do it [in the war’s immediate aftermath], they wouldn’t have been able to do it later.”

Nazmi Jubeh, a historian at Birzeit University in the West Bank, considers the demolition “an absolute act of violence against people and their houses and habitat. These are people who in a few hours lost everything. We lost an eight-centuries-long tradition of North Africans and Andalusians in Jerusalem that was an important element of historic Jerusalem.”



A Story of a City: The ‘Burak’

MAHDI KLEIBO

Muslims and Jews dispute the ownership of the *Burak* (known to the Jews as the Wailing Wall). The *Burak* is sacred to Muslims because it is the site where our Prophet Muhammad ascended to heaven. It is named “*Burak*” for the winged horse that the prophet rode from Mecca to Al Aqsa Mosque. The horse was tied to the Wall when Muhammad ascended to heaven.

The dispute over this Wall is increasing. Below, I share observations about the archeology and history of the Wall, which I hope will make clear the parameters of this conflict.

The *Burak* is approximately 180 feet long and 65 feet high, and it contains seven layers of underground stones; these stones are considered the most ancient stones in the area. One third of the Wall is buried beneath the soil. The pavement in front of the Wall rises about 2,322 feet above sea level, which is the lowest part of the Old City.

The area facing the site was excavated to reveal its hidden parts. These excavations showed that the old wall consisted of seven stone layers from the time of Emperor Herod (37-4 BCE); four other layers are from the 2nd century, and the

stones on the upper part of the Wall date back to the Byzantine era, the Umayyad (8th century), and the Mamluk periods (13th century).

During the Mamluk Period (1291-1516), Muslims took care of the Wall. Although Jews claimed that the Wall and its environs were part of King Solomon’s Temple, Muslims considered it to be a part of the Al Aqsa Mosque, the third holiest site for Muslims. It has remained under Muslim control (under the jurisdiction of the Waqf) even during the time of the Ottoman invasion (1516-1918) of the land, when the Turks allowed Jews to pray near the Wall as a gesture of tolerance.

In 1929, following a long-running dispute between Muslims and Jews over access to and modifications near the Western Wall (setting up chairs and a screen, or a barrier for prayer, which violated an Ottoman ruling), violence erupted. The Burak Uprising began after the Jewish holiday of Tisha B’Av (August 15, 1929), when several hundred right-wing Jews, many members of the Betar youth organization, marched to the Wall, raised the flag, and sang “Hatikva,” the national Jewish anthem.

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Mahdi Kleibo, a Palestinian born in 1972, lives in East Jerusalem. For the past eight years, he has been working with Palestinian nonprofits to develop socioeconomic productivity. He is also the representative for the Swiss Education Group with the External Academic Relations Office of Bethlehem University.

The next day, a demonstration organized by the Supreme Muslim Council marched to the Wall. Over the course of the next several days, after inflammatory leaflets and sermons had been disseminated, much violence ensued, including twelve attacks by Jews on Arabs and seven attacks by Arabs on Jews (according to a Jerusalem police report).

After the occupation of Jerusalem in 1967, the Israeli army destroyed and demolished the Ottoman and Muslim buildings near the site and in the Moroccan area (known as the Mugrabi Quarter) in order to build what became the plaza in front of the Wall.

Israelis have also excavated the area facing the Al Aqsa Mosque and destroyed the historic underside of the path near the mosque. They created what is called the “Hashmonaim Tunnel,” which starts from the southern side of the *Burak* and reaches the Ghawanmah Door in the North. There is another tunnel that reaches Silwan to the south of Al Aqsa, and some believe that this tunnel runs beneath the mosque itself.

The Israelis are now considering demolishing a hilly area near the Moroccan Door in order to enlarge and widen the southern part of the Wall and build a new bridge in the *Burak* square that leads to the door through which thousands of pilgrims enter. Some

observers fear that this plan includes a rebuilding of the Jewish Temple in that area adjacent to Al Aqsa Mosque.

According to the Christian gospel, Jesus Christ used to go to the Temple to teach his disciples, which angered the Jewish leaders at that time. The Muslims also believe that the prophet Muhammad used to pray facing the Al Aqsa Mosque while still in Mecca. This would mean that the Wall of the *Burak* existed even before Allah (God) took the Prophet Mohammad from Mecca to Jerusalem and then to heaven around the year 620 C.E.

Jerusalem is considered the closest city to heaven according to the three monotheistic religions, Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. The *Burak* is considered an Islamic holy site. Jews also consider the Wall a Jewish sacred place. As Muslims, we know we will never be able to gain the sympathy of the world to our cause if we deny the existence of Israeli holy places and historical facts. We hope the world will consider Jerusalem as a place to reconcile the millions of believers. Emotion is of course extreme in such a place where religious holy sites and people intermingle. It is for this reason that we must reach a peaceful agreement that depends on peaceful coexistence and mutual recognition of one another. 

Holiness Is...

As a musician and educator, I encounter a question every day: “What is holiness?” I put the question to a group of teen campers at Shwayder Camp in Idaho Springs, Colo. to see if I could gain some insight from them. Their responses follow:

Holiness is...

- when I need to talk to God
- listening to silence
- believing in the sun when the sun is not in the sky, believing in God when God is not with you
- “What? I’m so confused”
- the strength in my hands, the tip of my pen, the doctors who help to heal
- an ambiguous term; not something I can explain
- the boundaries that keep us in line
- a tree sprouting from the ground
- not hard to feel when we take time to really see or listen
- something I don’t think about
- being present
- practicing the same thing until you think you know what it is

- keeping kosher; none of my friends know what it means but that does not stop me
- a person who picks up trash when no one’s watching or takes extra time to check in with a stranger who seems to be having a hard time
- the wrong word: everything’s supposed to be holy, but what if holy means commonplace and we just don’t know it yet?
- a community in which people support each other and depend on each other
- my room, the place where I shut myself out of the world, do whatever I please, and allow myself to concentrate on my life
- sometimes passed down from generations
- what starts life and lets us keep going; writing my own story

Naomi Less, a worship and rock musician and an experiential Jewish educator, founded Jewish Chicks Rock. She is a founding company member of StorahTelling. She can be reached at naomiless.com.