

# Jerusalem?

**Professor of philosophy at Bir Zeit University, Sari Nusseibah is the son of a former Arab Governor of Jerusalem. One of the leading younger Palestinian spokesmen, Nusseibah envisages a united Jerusalem as the capital of two states, Israel and Palestine. He spoke to *New Outlook's* Dan Leon.**

■ Sari Nusseibah

**New Outlook:** Jews always stress the centrality of Jerusalem in their long history to justify their claim that the city must be the capital of Israel, and only of Israel. How do you as a Palestinian Jerusalemite view this claim?

**Sari Nusseibah:** Let's talk about the Arab claim to Jerusalem. In the first place, our ancestral roots precede the Jewish presence in Jerusalem and they have never been discontinued. Secondly, we have a claim as Muslims. Jerusalem has always occupied a "semi-divine" status in Islam, which explains its so-called non-centricity in the political context. Islam's Jerusalem is the earthly gateway to divine knowledge and spiritual accomplishment — this is my understanding of the story of Mohammad's miraculous ascension to heaven, which according to tradition took place at the site of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. As I see it, there is a great difference between Mecca, where God descended to man through the prophet Gabriel, and Jerusalem, where man was blessed by being allowed to ascend to heaven through the prophet Mohammad.

Jerusalem came into Muslim hands in a manner unlike all other accounts of Islam's expansion and conquest, that is through "the glories of Muslim armies." According to legend, Khalif Omar and his servant took turns riding a single camel on their long journey through the desert to Jerusalem, and the city fell peacefully into their custody in the seventh century.

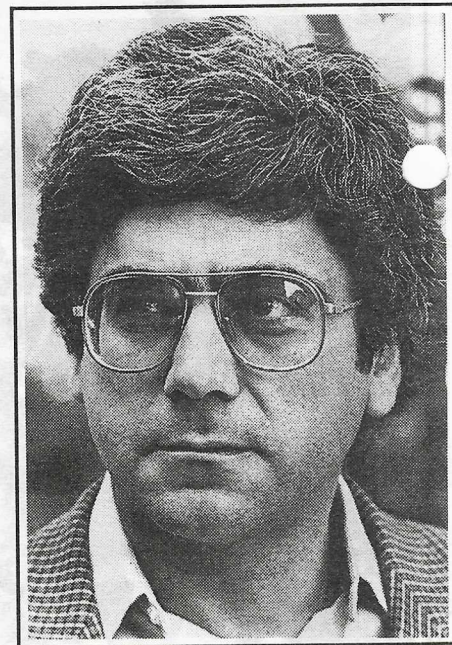
Jerusalem occupies a different spiritual place in Muslim tradition, one of humility and equality — ruler and ruled ride the same camel as they are the same vis-à-vis the Divinity and Jerusalem. From a Muslim point of view, therefore, Jerusalem was never regarded as a political capital or center not because the Arabs thought little of it, but on the contrary — because they believed that its status was sanctified. If Israelis fail to appreciate the significance of

this claim, I do not see how they can hope for anyone, including the Palestinians, to appreciate their equally strong spiritual claim.

**How do you view Mayor Teddy Kollek's claim to have bettered the lot of the residents of East Jerusalem?**

For us Palestinians in occupied East Jerusalem, Teddy Kollek has proved to be the *least bad* of the possible alternatives. Under his mayoralty nothing significant was done to develop Jerusalem's Arab neighborhoods — on the contrary, much was done to contain and even cripple the Arab presence in the city. Yet having said this, I must say that I can imagine far worse scenarios in the absence of a man like Teddy Kollek. In spite of his intense Jewish motivation, he has nevertheless shown, in his overall scheme, room for tolerance and respect for the sensitivities of others.

As to Kollek's claim about the lack of initiative of Jerusalem Arabs in defending our rights and promoting our own development — this is true. Over the last twenty-two years we have not used our potential in any organized or collective fashion to, at least, minimize the adverse effects of the continuous process of Jewish development in Jerusalem.



Rehamim Yisraeli

Sari Nusseibah  
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by choice — they cannot vote in national elections, but as residents they can vote in municipal elections. For similar reasons, we argued and won the battle to retain the Jordanian curriculum in East Jerusalem schools.

## There Are Injustices

There are injustices, but a measure of the blame lies with the Arabs themselves, and here the comparison with the ultra-Orthodox is a good one. Ever since Jerusalem was reunited, no Arab has been willing to stand for the City Council, neither as part of my list, nor on an independent Arab list. Those who were willing to consider such a candidacy were quickly dissuaded by threats or acts of terrorism by other Arabs. Why did they turn me into the sword of Islam? Why must I argue, time after time, for their slice of the pie? Come to a City Council meeting and see how effectively the various ultra-Orthodox parties fight for their constituencies. After two years of intifada, this may seem a quixotic complaint, but we are still living together and I believe we shall be living together for a long, long time.

Historical processes are slow, tediously slow compared to the span of a man's life. If we have not succeeded in finding the ideal *modus vivendi* in twenty years, it does not mean that the process is futile or in-

valid. Take, for example, the civil rights struggle in the United States. Legislation has improved tremendously and more and more blacks are gaining prominence in more fields than ever before. But the gap between most blacks and most whites remains as great as it ever was.

There is a psychological barrier that keeps Jews from traveling through Arab neighborhoods as freely as before, but it is in no way justified by statistics. Every year since 1967, a few Jews have been killed in Jerusalem by terrorist acts. Some years the losses were greater than others. Those sad numbers have not risen during the two years of intifada. Moreover, the difference in both the amount and seriousness of the violence between Jerusalem and either the West Bank or Gaza, from the beginning of the intifada until today, is striking.

The 1500 Arab municipal workers, out of a total of over 5,000 municipal employees in Jerusalem, have shown up for work on a regular basis, ignoring strike calls. Schools remain open. Municipal services are provided throughout the city. Freedom of worship and freedom of access to holy places are as sacredly guarded as ever. The freest press in the Arab world is based in East Jerusalem. The administration of the Temple Mount remains in Moslem hands.

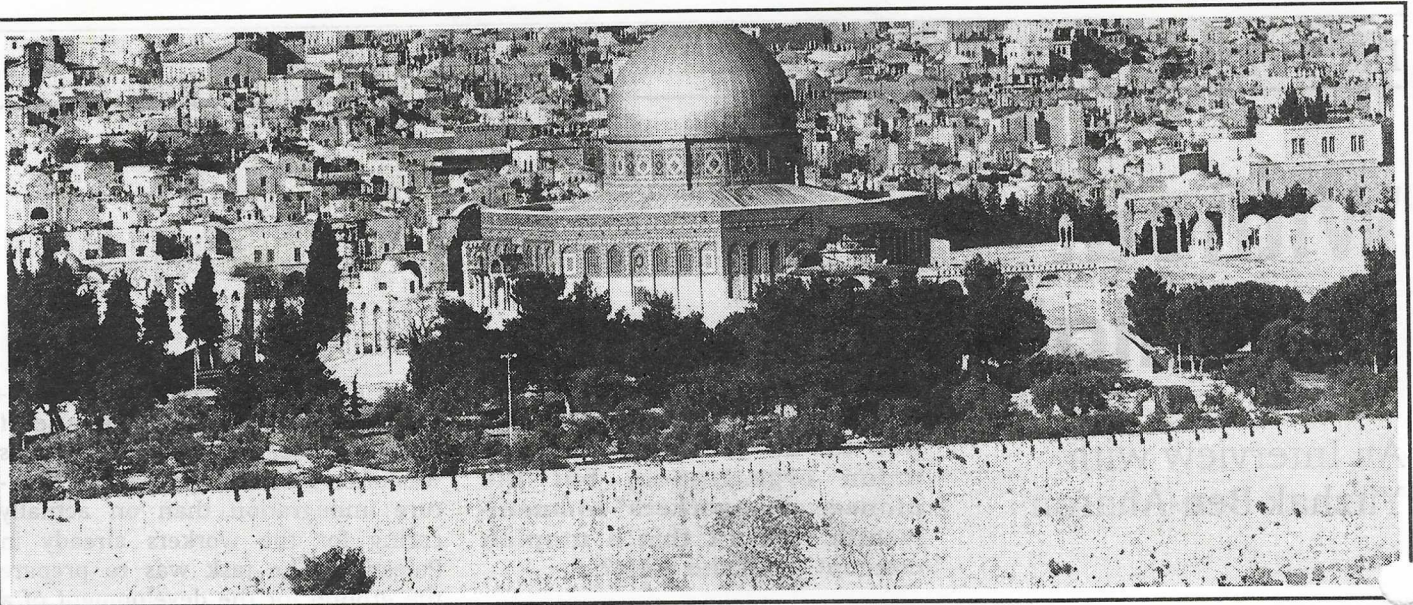
The intifada is both worrisome and depressing, more so outside of Jerusalem than within the city, though it has a negative impact on the city as well. Nevertheless, united Jerusalem shall endure. □



Jerusalem's Western Wall

Ilan Ossendyver





Jerusalem's Dome of the Rock

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This was a consequence of the generally held conviction that to play by the rules of the game is to implicitly recognize the legitimacy of the game. As we do not recognize Israel's annexation of Jerusalem, our policy has been to abstain from participating in municipal politics.

**How has the intifada influenced the situation in Jerusalem? Has it furthered the Palestinian cause in East Jerusalem, or resulted in increased fear, tension and mistrust?**

To go back a little, it is a great myth that Jerusalem was reunified when the physical barriers separating the two parts of the city were broken down in 1967. While the physical wall was destroyed, any objective observer can see that a far more impenetrable wall arose to replace it: a political wall dividing ruler from ruled, occupier from occupied, victor from vanquished. Many facets of this wall were, it is true, somewhat disguised through increasing economic and infrastructural integration of the two parts of the city. The intifada came in order to shake off this facade and to once again emphasize the existence of this steel barrier separating the two parts of Jerusalem.

Issues like fear and mistrust are symptoms, the essence of the barrier is an unbalanced equation: One side has realized its national and spiritual security in Jerusalem, while the other side feels its spiritual existence under threat and its national aspirations totally ignored. The role of the intifada in this situation has been to make the wall apparent and prominent once again.

**The Palestinian Declaration of Independence proclaims Jerusalem as the capital of the new Palestinian state. Do you propose redividing the city along the lines of 1948-1967? What would be the fate of the approximately 100,000 Jews in**

**Jerusalem living on the other side of the old Green Line? In short, what is the Palestinian alternative to the concept of a united Jerusalem as the capital of Israel?**

It is obvious that much imagination and creativity will have to be applied by both sides in order to implement a plan by which Jerusalem would serve as the capital of two states, Israel and Palestine. I do not believe that the Palestinians will want to put up a physical wall to separate the two parts of the city. One proposal is to draw an imaginary line separating the two sovereign territories; such a line need not be continuous. In other words, it is quite feasible to imagine the existence of what one might call "scattered sovereignty," by which it would be possible to create zones of sovereignty which are not necessarily continuous geographically.

It will be necessary to work out a plan for municipal interaction and cooperation between the two capitals. There could be different degrees of integration and cooperation, culminating in the idea of implementing some form of joint municipal supervision. Many sensitivities must be taken into account in drawing up the final model, and both sides will have to stretch their powers of imagination in a way that will enable them to make the minimal compromises necessary. I personally believe that a united city serving as the capital of both Israel and Palestine could serve as a model for any future relationship which might evolve between the two states further down the road.

If we can make enough spiritual and national room for each other, there is reason to hope for a future for our two peoples which will have a significant impact not only on our countries and our region, but on the entire world. There is no reason why we cannot hope to see a modern-day Maimonides and Alfarabi passing hand in hand by the Western Wall, providing the world with the fruits of our common Semitic genius. □