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Zionism without Jerusalem

“The relevant areas within the Old City of Jerusalem, to be delimited under the authority of the League of Nations, shall enjoy the same measure of extra-territoriality as that universally recognized in the case of embassies,” wrote Ze’ev Jabotinsky in 1940 regarding the future political status of the ancient city. In addition, “Each of these areas shall constitute a municipality under a council appointed by agreement between the ecclesiastic authorities concerned.”

The above is from Article 4 of the draft constitution for a Jewish state on both sides of the Jordan River, which was approved by the Revisionist movement in 1934 and published in Jabotinsky’s last book, “The Jewish War Front,” in 1940 (reissued as “The War and the Jew” in 1942).

The natural ease with which the “right marker” of political Zionism, the originator of the concept of Greater Israel, relinquished Jewish sovereignty in the heart of historical Jerusalem, attests to one of the fundamental facts of Zionist history, which its scholars know well: Contrary to Education Minister Naftali Bennett’s baseless statements on the eve of U.S. President Donald Trump’s recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, according to which “There is no Zionism without Jerusalem,” the Jewish

people’s national-religious connection to Jerusalem never played a central role in the national conception of modern political Zionism.

Because one of the Zionist movement’s declared goals, clearly reflected in Theodor Herzl’s “The Jewish State” and “Altneuland,” was attaining a historic reconciliation between Jews and the nations of the world, political Zionism from its inception never raised the idea of Jewish control over areas common to multiple faiths that were often centers of tension in Jerusalem’s Old City.

It was not a coincidence that in “Altneuland,” Herzl did not locate the Temple on the Temple Mount. He thus gave symbolic yet prominent expression to political Zionism’s tendency to keep its distance from the Old City and environs, as well as expressing political apathy toward it, an apathy that was also apparent in Jabotinsky’s Revisionist constitution.

While Jerusalem’s place in modern Zionist nationalism is fairly minor, the same cannot be said for Palestinian nationalism. The Palestinian people is the most humiliated of the Arab peoples, in terms of nationalism. It is the only Arab people under foreign rule. Its national territory is bisected by the occupation authorities into ghettolike enclaves. These enclaves are shrinking because of the criminal settlement enterprise, which

thrives in violation of international law. And we haven’t even mentioned the world’s most crowded prison, the Gaza Strip.

This prison’s nominally autonomous leadership is forced to collaborate with the occupation and ordered to snuff out the merest spark of popular resistance. If that were not enough, it is regularly threatened with punishment by the occupier and its powerful ally across the ocean, lest it dare complain to the International Criminal Court about the crimes of Israeli colonialism. In the light of all this, the affinity of Palestinian nationalism for Haram al-Sharif, the Arabic term for the Temple Mount, symbolizes the precious little left of the Palestinian people’s national dignity, which is abused daily.

That is why Bennett’s claim that Jerusalem is not mentioned in the Koran is so ridiculous. No matter how many times Jerusalem is mentioned (or not) in the Koran, the important thing is that al-Quds, the Arabic name for Jerusalem, is more deeply ingrained than ever in the shattered national soul of the Palestinian people.

The permission to continue expanding the occupation and settlement enterprise in East Jerusalem that was implied in the declaration of the pyromaniac in the White House — who recognized Jerusalem as Israel’s capital without distinguishing between legitimate Israeli ar-

eas and its occupied parts — together with the cries of joy of ultranationalist-religious Israel, brought the humiliation and oppression of the Palestinian people to new heights. Clearly, Palestinian nationalism will continue to react with fierce opposition, regardless of Israel’s response.

It is hard to guess how the current round of violence between Israel and the Palestinians will end, but it can be hoped that the historic willingness of political Zionism to make concessions on Jerusalem will result in a compromise over East Jerusalem, in the spirit of the Zionist patriarchs.

For this to happen, Israel must adopt the theological-political position of the founder of political Zionism when he proposed building the Temple outside the site indicated by Jewish law. According to this position, the volatile theological explosive that Jewish tradition has carried on its back for 2,000 years must be deactivated once and for all; it must be declared, decisively and absolutely, that Israeli sovereignty will not be exercised in and around the Old City.

A necessary condition for Israel to adopt this position is the eradication of the messianic political plague that has spread throughout the body of the state since 1967, and is pushing it and the entire region into a fatal conflagration of religious war.