

Abraham's Table Luncheon held at Congregation Beth Hatikvah on Tuesday May 11, 2010. It was a great day to listen to 3 very insightful speakers talk about "What the Holy Land Means to Me". We enjoyed a very nice lunch provided by the IDC, and also very good questions asked after the 3 speakers shared their thoughts.

Ariann Weitzman was the first speaker. She started by reading a poem. She talked about her visit to holy land and how every step she took, every stone and leaf was telling her a story. It was not just a land according to her spiritual experience.

Andrea Walker the second speaker talked about her experience to the holy land, a place where Jesus was from. She talked about the most vibrant Mount Olives, the touching the feeling, seeing the rock on which Jesus prayed on. She looked down the hill, walked down the Mount Olives to see tombstones; she sat and talked about structure. Jesus said "if we didn't praise God the graves would open up.

Dr. Levent Koç said, "Jerusalem is a holy land". below is a longer summary of Dr. Koç's presentation as Islam's perspective on the Holy Land is less known compared to other religions.

Three mosques and thereby three cities are holy in Islam. First one is Masjid Al-Haram in the city of Makka. Second is Masjid Al-Nabawi in Madinah and third is Masjid Al-Aqsa in Jerusalem.

Abu Dharr reported that he asked the Prophet (pbuh), "O Messenger of Allah, which Masjid was built first on earth"? The Prophet replied, "The Sacred Masjid of Makka". Abu Dharr again asked, "Which was next"? The Prophet said, "Masjid Al-Aqsa". Abu Dharr further asked, "How long was the period between the building of the two Masjids"? The Prophet said, "Forty years". Apart from these, offer your prayer anywhere when it is time to pray, although excellence is in praying in these Masjids". (Bukhari)

Glory to (Allah) Who did take His Servant for Journey by night from the Masjid-al-Haram to Masjid-al-Aqsa whose precincts We did bless in order that We might show him some of Our Signs: for He is the one Who heareth and seeth (all things). (Qur'an, 17/1). As the verse declares not only the mosque but the neighborhoods around are blessed by God.

In another verse God says, "And We made a people, who were considered weak (and of no account), inheritors of lands in both East and West lands whereon We sent down Our blessings. The fair promise of your Lord was fulfilled for the Children of Israel, because they had patience and constancy, and We leveled to the ground the great works and fine buildings which Pharaoh and his people erected (with such pride)". (Qur'an, 7/137)

We said: O fire, be coolness and peace for Abraham. And they wanted to harm him, but We made them the worst losers. We delivered him and (his nephew) Lot (and directed them) to the land which, We have blessed for the nations. (Qur'an, 21/69-71)

In the verses above Jerusalem is mentioned as city blessed. In the verses below why Muslims consider the mosque in Jerusalem (Masjid Al-Aqsa) holy is explained. It is because Zakariya prayed in this mosque, Mary secluded herself in this mosque and she was bestowed upon with God's blessings in this mosque.

So Zakariya came out to his people from his chamber: he told them by signs to celebrate Allah's praises in the morning and in the evening. (Qur'an, 19/11)

Right graciously did her (Mary) Lord accept her: He made her grow in purity and beauty; to the care of Zakariya was she assigned. Every time that he entered (her) chamber to see her, he found her supplied with sustenance. He said: "O Mary! whence (comes) this to you?" She said: "From Allah: for Allah provides sustenance to whom He pleases, without measure." (Qur'an, 3/37)

While he was standing in prayer in the chamber, the angels called unto him: "Allah does give you glad tidings of Yahya (John), witnessing the truth of a Word from Allah and (be besides) noble, chaste, and a Prophet, of the (goodly) company of the righteous." (Qur'an, 3/39)

Dr. Koç also mentioned a saying of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh): “Visit Masjid-al-Aqsa for prayer! If you cannot go for prayer then send some oil to be used for its lamps”.

He finished by saying, “For many years there is fighting there, but we have hope that the members of these three religions will live in the Holy Land peacefully.”

Pictures from the Event below:





Spring 2014, Rutgers-Camden, NJ. Photo by Dr. David L. Baker, Director, Center for the Study of the Holy Land, Rutgers-Camden, NJ