



Assalamu Alaykum

Dear Students,

I hope this letter reaches you with the best of health and Iman. Just sending a reflection.

In the last letter, we spoke about one of the sacred spaces: the human heart. This time, we speak about another sacred space, the House of remembrance of God. If the spiritual heart is the center of the human being, the house of worship is the center of the community and its own spiritual heart.

If the spiritual heart is ill, the entire person or community is ill. The way you care for your heart will reveal the way you care for your whole self or your community. If you care for the mosque, you will care for the community. If you seek to dominate the mosque, you will seek to dominate the community. If you disregard the mosque, the other behaviors follow.

In our greater Islamic Tradition, we know that the entire world is a mosque. Thus, the entire world is sacred. So, the way you treat the earth reflects what you think of humanity, the animals, the plants, the mountains, the structures, etc.. If you do not pay attention to your immediate environment, then it follows that you will not pay attention to the anonymous people around you.


Still, there is no spot in the earth that is more sacred than a human being. We are taught that even if the most sacred structure (the Ka'ba) was damaged or destroyed, we must first check on the well-being of the people.

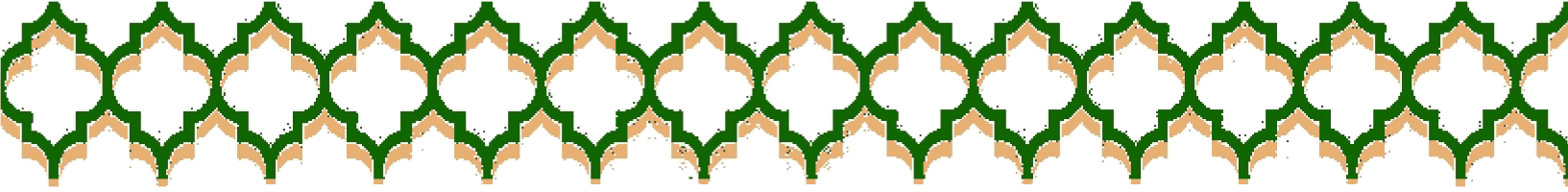
The most sacred of such spaces on the earth, then, is the Haram in Makkah (Mecca), where the Ka'ba is located. Consider that if there were only two Muslims in the world, they would be praying inside the Ka'ba. What is inside? An empty space. It is also our direction of prayer. As I type this, millions of Muslims (literally) have begun the lifetime journey to the Haram, as part of their pilgrimage. Consider that when these pilgrims walk around the Ka'ba in their circumambulation, they walk counterclockwise: it happens that the heart is closer to the Ka'ba that way.

Take these points a step further. If you want to get the sense of a community, look at its Friday prayers. How do people conduct themselves, what is the sermon like, how do people enter and leave? What are the cleaning/ablution facilities like? If you want to get a sense of the whole Ummah, look at Hajj.

The second most sacred is the Haram in Madinah (Medina), commonly known as the Mosque of the Prophet, may peace be upon him. It is within this structure that we also find the Rawdah, which is reported to be a small taste of Paradise. It is also within this structure that we find the grave of the Prophet Muhammad, may peace be upon him, and two of his blessed companions, may God be pleased with them. Madinah is also host to a number of other mosques with special histories.

The third most sacred is the Haram in Jerusalem, commonly known as the Farthest Mosque (al-Aqsa). One thing to consider is that when we speak of al-Aqsa, we speak not of that golden domed, blue structure, which is the Dome of the Rock. It marks (among other things) the place





from where the Prophet, may peace be upon him, ascended in his blessed night journey. We also do not speak of the physical building a few yards away, that is today called “al-Masjid al-Aqsa.” The actual “Aqsa” mosque is the whole campus.

In Shi’i (Shia) tradition, there are a number of other sacred sites, including (among others) the Haram of Imam Ali (Najaf, Iraq), the Maqam of Imam Husayn (Karbala, Iraq), and the Mosque of Sayyida Zaynab (Damascus, Syria). May God be pleased with each of them.

What else, then, by extension, is sacred? Two things to consider.

The temple is a sacred space. The temples of other traditions, be they churches, synagogues, hindu temples, buddhist temples, gurdwaras, are sacred spaces. There are some commentators who suggest that Muslims have a greater responsibility to protect the temples of non-Muslims than our own mosques, citing specific Divine word choices in the Qur’an.

It is in the history of conquest that temples are often replaced by other temples. In Istanbul, there is the Aya Sofia. It was a roman pagan temple. On that space was built a church, which was rebuilt to be the largest church on the planet. That church was then converted to a mosque. Today it is a museum.


Hindu-Muslim relations in Chicago became very tense in the early 1990s, when an old mosque in Ayodhya, India was converted into a Hindu Temple (or, convert back into a Hindu Temple, before the Mughal conquest). A decade after that event, excavation revealed that prior to being a Hindu Temple, it was a Buddhist Temple. Chances are that before being a Buddhist Temple, it was something else.

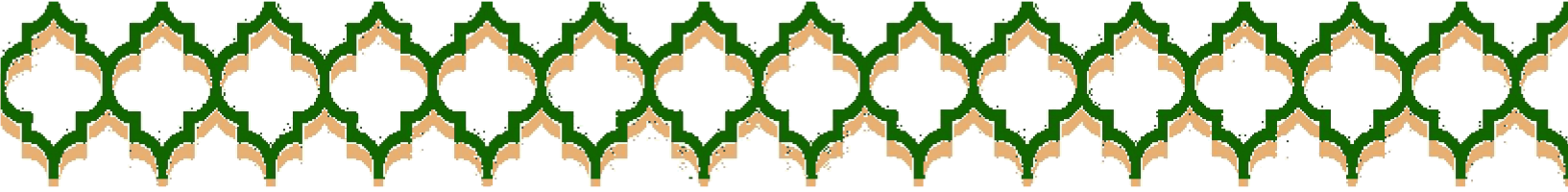
And, of course, we have the history of Jerusalem, which requires a whole separate exploration at some point.

The other point to consider is that the home is a sacred space. In much history, especially in Islamic law, the space inside the home was private space, and outside of the jurisdiction of the authorities (except in the case of danger). Much of the Modern era has witnessed the absolute dominance of public space by government and marketing. More and more of this post-Modern era has witnessed an invasion of private space, first through media, and now through government-authorized monitoring. It is as though we are witnessing the end of privacy. That removal of privacy is a form of steady violence to the self.

Consider what it means to regard a physical space as sacred. You enter the space with respect and reverence. You conduct yourself with maturity and manners. You keep the space meticulously clean. Greater than all of these, you use the space for the remembrance of the Divine, and nothing worldly. To harm the sacred spaces is to do the opposite, starting with the prevention of the remembrance of the Divine.

Having said this, I have a few requests. First, when you come to the Mosque on campus, treat it with respect as something far more serious than your lounge to take your naps. Meaning, enter it with the reverence you should have toward a sacred space. Second, please keep the space clean, every time you visit it.





And third, take a moment to visit the sacred spaces of the other traditions on campus, and in the city. Of course, make sure you find out the proper manners for your entry and visit.

And God knows best.

May Allah bless you.

Omer Mozaffar

*Muslim Chaplain*

*Loyola University Chicago*

