

## **WESTERN [WAILING] WALL:**

The Jews' sacred place of worship; aka the **Wailing Wall** [in Urdu **DEEWAR E GIRYA**] referring to the service and the way of worship of Jews being mournful at the site over the destruction of their Temples. It is the holiest Jewish site in the world and a renowned symbol of Jerusalem's Old City. It is a huge wall built in golden [lime] stone, with Jews praying in front of it, stuffing their written prayers in the cracks between stones. It is believed to be the last remnant wall of the Second Temple of Jerusalem, destroyed by the Romans at the time of city's conquer in year 70 AD – **First Jewish-Roman War** is referred for more details.

The 50m long & 19m high Western Wall makes the southern side elevation of the **Haram Sharif** [Temple Mount] - the holiest site in Islam, Judaism and Christianity. It is one of the few surviving sections of the enclosure built by King Herod in year 19 BC.

Interestingly, the term **Western Wall** is mostly used for the section traditionally used by Jews for prayer. During the period of Christian Roman rule over Jerusalem (c324–638 AD), Jews were completely barred from Jerusalem except to attend *Tisha be-Av*, the day of national mourning for the Temples, and on this day the Jews weep at their holy places. The term '**Wailing Wall**' was thus exclusively used by Christians, and was revived in the period of non-Jewish control between the establishment of British Rule in 1920 and the Six-Day War in 1967. The term '**Wailing Wall**' is not used by Jews - considering it derogatory – thus, of course, hate calling it so.

The wall was considered Muslim property as an integral part of the Haram Sharif and WAQF property of the Moroccan Quarter. The earliest source mentioning this specific site as a place of worship is from the 16th century. From mid-19th century onwards, attempts to purchase rights to the wall and its immediate area were made by various Jews, but none was successful. With the

rise of the **Zionist movement** in the early 20th century, the wall became a source of friction between the Jewish and Muslim communities. During those outbreaks of violence at the foot of the wall became commonplace, with a particularly deadly **riot in 1929** in which 133 Jews were killed and 339 injured.

After the 1948 Arab–Israeli War the Eastern portion of Jerusalem was occupied by Jordan and Jews were discouraged to live even in their Jewish quarter – so most of them left Jerusalem. The position changed on 10<sup>th</sup> June 1967, when Israel gained control of the site following the Six-Day War. Three days after establishing control over the Western Wall site the Moroccan Quarter was bulldozed by Israeli authorities to create space for what is now the Western Wall plaza and Jewish prime place of worship.

Since centuries Jews from throughout the world made the difficult pilgrimage to Jerusalem and immediately headed for the Western Wall to thank God. For c.2000 plus years, Jerusalem remained under the Christian and Muslim rule and the Jews were fewer in numbers – but its dignity was kept intact by all rulers. This surviving section of the **Wall** which, in ancient times formed a part of the Herod's Temple Mount [not Temple itself] has always been a source of comfort and consolation in misfortune. Now the tourists and visitors also avail privilege of wedging their prayer & wish slips of paper, into the cracks between the stones.

A giant wooden bridge at the right side of the Western Wall – allows pilgrims to ascend to the **Haram Plaza**. One can still see a **wooden walkway** that leads above the Wall to the Haram plateau - the only entry point for non-Muslim tourists. As discussed earlier, the wooden structure was erected after an earthen ramp collapsed in 2004, following an earthquake and heavy snowfall.

## **WESTERN WALL TUNNELS:**

To the left of the Western Wall, one should take tour of the tunnels along the foundations of the **Temples**. While entering northern side of the Wall, visitors walk through a series of rooms moving eastward until they hit the Western Wall – then continue straight northward. During the walk in the Tunnels, visitors will pass by the Second Temple era homes, ancient cisterns, constructions from the Muslim period, a channel from the Hasmonean period and more - ***the guided tour normally lasts around 75 minutes***. The Tunnels run along about 488 meters of the Western Wall, giving visitors a taste for the challenge that stood before King Herod during the expansion of the Temple Mount. **One such example is a stone which is 14m long and weighs almost 570 tons.**

These complex underground Tunnels tell much about the **Hasmonean period** [140 - 116 BC] - the structures are supported by many arches and contain stairways that connected the ancient city with the Temple Mount. The Tunnels were first discovered during digs done by British archaeologists in the 19th century, but the intense digging was done after 1967 by the Israel government. Inside, one also finds the most special place for Jews - **the part of the Western Wall considered closest to spot where the Holy of the Holies** used to be in the Temples; there is a small synagogue where Jews come to pray as a special occasion.

#### **OPHEL ARCH. PARK:**

At the foot of the **Haram Sharif** [Temple Mount], one can find the **Hulda Gates**, a series of gates through which people used to ascend to the plaza through rising tunnels. Nearby, the Jew tourists also see archaeological remains of water cisterns, market stalls and structures from the First Temple period. In the vicinity of Dung Gate, amidst more excavations, there lies **The Ophel** [or **Ophlas**] – the biblical name given to a certain part of settlement or city that is elevated from its surroundings. In the **Hebrew Bible** this Ophel refers to a specific part in two

cities: the extended **City of David**; and **Samaria** [2 Kings 5:24].

A unique activity - at various spots on the wide and thriving plaza, the Muslim males gather in study groups, reading the Qur'an and the Jews reciting their Torah contentedly before the West Wall and its attached synagogues. Everything is fine for the travellers and the tourists at least – if one is having non-Israeli passport with him.

#### **BURNT HOUSE & WHOL MUSEUM:**

In the Jewish Quarter of city, the tourists see the remains of a priestly home that was set on fire when Jerusalem fell in the **year 70 AD**; the sound and light show here makes the fall of Jerusalem chillingly real.

The **Burnt House** is a little museum now presenting an excavated site from the **Second Temple** period situated six metres below current street level. Ancient Jerusalem's Upper City was known for its wealth; was located close to the Temple and inhabited by priestly families who used to serve in the temple. When the Romans stormed the Upper City, they found little resistance: Much of the population was near death from disease and starvation due to hard siege. After 1967's reunification, the **Jewish Quarter** was rebuilt, and extensive archaeological excavations were conducted in the area during years 1969 to 1982 - **The Burnt House** was then found under a layer of ashes.

The Burnt House is only one part of a large complex buried under the Jewish Quarter. The ground floor of this House has courtyard, four rooms, a kitchen and a bath; walls built of stones and covered with thick white plaster; and round sunken bases of brown clay. The excavated house is open to the public and a 12-minute audio-visual presentation, set up inside the house, plays back the nearly 2000-year-old events too.

Across the street there is WHOL MUSEUM which was once a priestly home during the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple days. Behind the modern facade, one can see ritual baths, frescoes and get an idea of what daily life was like then. Located underground, it preserves remains of six houses from the **Herodian** period that were excavated after 1967. In Temple times, high gentry' homes were built on this hill overlooking the Temple Mount - but were also got destroyed in 70 AD. Carefully excavated, the site includes water cisterns, elaborate bathrooms with beautiful floors, reception halls with colourful stucco paintings and mosaic – reflecting living **of 2000 years ago**. The homes here are about seven meters below the present-day street level.

In the nearby **Temple Institute**, the tourists see reproductions of apparatus used in the service of the holy Temple; sacred vessels created by the Institute, garments of High Priests, religious oil-paintings and model of the Holy Temple attract all.

### **THE CARDO:**

The cities of the Ancient Roman Empire had a special tradition of decorating main roads with spectacular stone columns. These streets were called **CARDO** and Jerusalem, just like any other Roman city, had a Cardo of its own. This ancient street originates at Damascus Gate in the north, running southwards through the Old City, terminating at Zion Gate. It was city's main street some 1800 years ago; was originally paved in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century when Hadrian rebuilt Jerusalem as a Roman polis called **Aelia Capitolina**. The Cardo was extended south to the area of today's Jewish Quarter in the 6<sup>th</sup> century by the Byzantine Emperor Justinian as a high commercial centre. Prehistoric columns and shops are still visible. The roofed part, reconstructed in Crusader times, now houses boutiques and archaeological sites both.

In its day, **The Cardo** was an exceptionally wide colonnaded street running through the heart of the city, connecting many of Byzantine

Jerusalem's major institutions. Parallel rows of columns supported a red ceramic tile roof and an arcade ran along, at least part of its eastern side. A section of Cardo has been reactivated as a shopping street, full of arts and various goods of tourists' interest. In part of the preserved Cardo, the French School of Art Creation installed a large painting of the Byzantine replica of **The Cardo**.

In another [open] section of **The Cardo** there are some of the pillars. Part of the Cardo has been restored to show how the stalls and shops were in Roman times. Occasionally, there are theme days with actors dressed in period costume running various hands on activities for the tourists and travellers.

### **HURVA SYNAGOGUE:**

During 16<sup>th</sup> century, a Jewish group acquired land for building a synagogue and named it as **The Ashkenazi Courtyard**. They built it but with great financial difficulties; was repeatedly constructed and destroyed over and over again until finally completed in 1864 – then named as HURVA [the ruins].

Then the Hurva Synagogue was designed and constructed under the supervision of Assad Effendi, the Ottoman Sultan's official architect. Built in Byzantine Revival style, it was supported by four massive pilasters at each corner over which soared a large dome. However, the then Jewish organisers could construct only one of these towers due to paucity of funds. The height of the synagogue to the bottom of its dome was designed around 16 m and to the top of the dome it was 24 m but the Jews could construct 12m high. Twelve windows were placed around the base of the dome, which was surrounded by a veranda. Being one of the tallest structures in the Old City, it was visible for miles.

From 1864 onwards, the Hurva Synagogue was considered the most beautiful and most

important synagogue in the Land of Israel. It was described as **the glory of the Old City**. However, during 1948's war [exactly on 27<sup>th</sup> May], someone placed a 200-litre barrel filled with explosives against the synagogue wall. The results were evident as the huge explosion reduced the 84-year-old synagogue to rubble and debris. The Jordanian Army was blamed for it and they had accepted the responsibility.

After Israel's take over in June 1967, plans for **HURVA's** reconstruction were developed in which the ruins were incorporated in a memorial garden, a new structure of synagogue and a Walking Route of the Prophets, leading to the Western Wall. Following the Beaux-Arts tradition, the elements of architecture were conceived as hollow; the outer structure composed of 16 piers covered in golden Jerusalem stone cut in blocks like of the Western Wall. BUT the whole structure was coming up at a scale **comparable to the Golden Dome of the Baitul Maqdas**.

When Teddy Kollek, the then mayor of Jerusalem, learned of plans to design the **HURVA** at a scale comparable to the Dome of the Rock, he went unsupportive and discarded the proposal altogether. In 1977, one of the four stone arches that had originally supported the synagogue's monumental dome was re-designed. The height of the original building, including the dome, was made 50% greater. Its old glory and splendour was also brought back in wholesome.