

## **BAIT UL MAQDAS**

### **TEMPLE MOUNT HARAM SHARIF** **GOLDEN DOME:**

The people from around the world come to Jerusalem to see the **Temple Mount**; Muslims call it the **Haram Sharif**. Travellers' first day engagements surround this holy place for which they travel from their far flung hometowns. After dumping their travel-bags in their hotel rooms, if it is daytime, the explorers and holiday-makers both, rush towards the Old City to see the Golden Dome first.

Muslims can enter the **Haram Sharif** [Temple Mount] complex through any of the Old City gates; preferably they make choice of gate near their staying lodge. The people staying in East Jerusalem use **Herods Gate** or **Damascus Gate**; the travellers staying in the main city normally enter through **Dung Gate** or **Jaffa Gate**; the people staying in the northern Jerusalem prefer to use **Lions Gate** but feel equally convenient while passing through busy **Damascus Gate**.

If making entrance through Dung Gate, the travellers follow a queue for going to the Haram Sharif [Temple Mount] which will take them through a hanging wooden passage after security checks. The other queue leads towards the Western Wall [*Deewar e Giryā*] where the Jewish visitors pray.

Muslims do pray on the **Haram Sharif**, but Christians and Jews may only **visit the site** as tourists. They are forbidden from singing, praying, or making any kind of '*religious displays*'. All tourists can enter regardless of their age or gender and for Non-Muslims, the **Visiting Hours** are from **Sunday to Thursday**: [in **Winter**] 0730 hours till 1030 hrs & 1230 hrs till 1330 hrs [In **Summer** it is +1 hour]. The **Haram Sharif [Temple Mount]** is closed to Non-Muslim visitors on Fridays because Palestinian Muslims along with their families from all the cities around come there for prayer

– leaving no space for tourists to walk around. Similarly on Saturdays, the visit to Western Wall is normally discouraged to all except Jews.

In order to enter **Haram Sharif**, both men and women need to be dressed modestly. No religious articles like prayer book or tablet are allowed – and visitors are frequently asked to show their passports at so many places. On the Haram Sharif plaza, the most significant attraction is the **Golden Dome**; in historical literature called **Dome of the Rock [Qubbat El-Sakhrah]** in Arabic]. **Ibn e Batuta**, the famous travel writer, narrated in 14<sup>th</sup> century that:

*"Dome of the Rock is a building of extraordinary beauty, solidity, elegance, and singularity of shape."*

### **DOME OF THE ROCK**

Also known and seen as **GOLDEN DOME**; the magnificent, splendid and glorious, is the landmark of this ancient city. In all literary descriptions - it is called the DOME OF THE ROCK. Referring to [SACREDSITES.COM](http://SACREDSITES.COM); "..... following a brief period of Persian rule, Jerusalem was taken over by the Muslim Caliph Umar [RA]; he cleansed the Temple Mount, built a small mosque and dedicated the site to Muslim worship.....The site chosen was the same very rock where previously had stood the Jupiter temple of the Romans and before that, the two temples of the Jews."

At this blessed site, the 9th [Ummayyad] Caliph, Abd al-Malik, built the great Dome of the Rock between 691-92 AD. The dome is 20 meters high, 10 meters in diameter, and its supporting structure, made of lead, was covered in pure gold. The sacred foundation stone is encircled by sixteen arches that formerly came from different churches in Jerusalem, which were destroyed during the Persian occupation of the city in 614 AD. Writing of the sublimely beautiful structure with its heavenly dome, its columns of rare marble and its brilliant mosaics, the British

authority on Muslim architecture, KAC Creswell, once exclaimed:

*"Under a scheme whereby the size of every part is related to every other part in some definite proportion, the building instead of being a collection of odd notes becomes a harmonious chord in stones, a sort of living crystal.....Some of the ratios involved are fundamental in time and space, they go right down to the very basis of our nature, and of the physical universe in which we live and move."*

Till year 969 AD, the Jews and Christians were allowed to freely visit the Holy City and the Golden Temple. This era of peaceful coexistence ended in that year when control of the city passed to the Fatimid caliphs of Egypt. In 1071 AD the Seljuk Turks defeated the Byzantines, displaced the Egyptians and closed the ages-old pilgrimage routes. The prohibition of Christian pilgrimage angered Western Europe and became a contributing cause of the Crusades, a series of invasions that culminated in the capture of Jerusalem in 1099 AD and the Christian Kingdom lasted almost 90 years till Saladin's take over in 1187 AD. The Jews, who were exiled by the Crusaders, were called back by Saladin and allowed them to settle in Jerusalem.

**Jerusalem**, in fact the whole Old City, remained charged since thirty centuries with holiness, devotion and spiritual love; the control of the city shifted frequently between the religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The Moriah ROCK was first a Jebusite place of worship, then the site of the Jewish Temples, next the sanctuary of the Roman god Jupiter, later capped by the Muslim's Dome of the Rock, taken over by the Christians again [for 90 years], and still later a Muslim shrine again. Some are fortunate enough to be inside the Golden Dome, it's awfully moving, regardless of one's faith.

The holy **Golden Dome** is situated on a hill [Mount Moriah], the highest elevation in Jerusalem's proximity. History tells that Jews had also participated in the construction of the

**Haram**, laying the groundwork for both the Al-Aqsa and El-Sakhrah mosques – making Jerusalem the third-holiest city, after Makkah and Medina.

The Rock, as you see it today [in 2018] is enclosed by two aisles that circle the holy rock itself and an octagonal wall surrounding it. The central row of sixteen pillars [*four piers and twelve columns*] supporting a rounded drum that transitions into the two-layered dome. The columns are clad in marble and are adorned with exceptional mosaics. The ethereal interior atmosphere is a result of light that pours in from grilled marble windows in exterior walls.

The **Golden Dome** also contains 240 meters long inscription comprising of verses from the holy Qur'an – in an architectural context; the *Bismillah* and the *Kalima e shahada* are repeatedly included in it. Many of the 45,000 blue and gold exterior tiles were installed under Turk Caliph Suleiman the Magnificent.

Four doors, clad with copper by Qaitbay, 18<sup>th</sup> Mamluk Sultan of Egypt [1468-96 AD], lead into the interior and in the centre lies the **Holy Rock**. Just less than 18m long by 13.25m across, it is surrounded by a grille installed by the Crusaders in the 12<sup>th</sup> century to prevent relic collectors from breaking off pieces of the ROCK. Underneath is a cave, called as **Bir el-Arwah [Well of Souls]**, where it is believed that the souls of the nobles and spirits often come, gather and pray.

Till today, it's a holy place in Islam for being the spot from which Nabi Muhammad pbuh ascended to heaven with the angel Gabriel on his Holy Night Journey, in which he met past prophets including Nabi Moses AS and Nabi Jesus AS. The holy Qur'an also speaks reverently of the prophets of Judaism and Christianity, so it is equally sacred for all.

The **Golden Dome** was built originally in **692 AD; collapsed in 1015 AD and rebuilt in 1022-23 AD**. The most recent restoration of the site was carried out in 1998 by Jordan's King

Hussein II, who helped the shrine with funding of 80 kilograms of gold required to coat the dome.

One of the reasons why the sanctuary remained intact through the centuries, withstanding earthquakes that destroyed many nearby structures, is its octagonal shape. In short, the Golden Dome is the magnificent structure standing as a symbol of God's glory for 1300 years. It is the place where **THE FOUNDATION STONE** – [Biblical name of the **ROCK**] is located under the octagonal Dome. As per Jewish belief, it was the location of the **Holy of Holies** [explained in later pages] in the Jewish Temple.

The **Golden Dome** and the **ROCK** remained the holiest site in Judaism throughout its history. Jews also identify this **ROCK** as place of the **Binding of Isaac** with an **Altar** [a table-like structure on which religious sacrifices used to be done]. As per Judaism & Christianity, Nabi Abraham AS fulfilled God's test to see if he would be willing to sacrifice his son. Nabi Issac AS was thirty seven years old then. Hebrew Bible's **Genesis** 22:2 states that the event of sacrifice occurred at **Mount Moriah**.

**Muslim History** has diverse narration for this holy **ROCK** because the Qur'an has given a very explicit version about its account - that Nabi Abraham AS was commanded to sacrifice his elder son – and Nabi Ishmael AS was about 17 years older than Nabi Isaac AS. Moreover, the place of sacrifice was **ARAFAAT** near Makkah – and not Jerusalem. The Jews, Christians and Muslims keep the same faith; holy Bible's **Genesis** 16:7-16 & 25:17 and the **holy Qur'an** 37:101-106 are referred. In researchers' view, **holy Qur'an's** 11:71–74 and the **Genesis** 17:17 & 18:11 [of the Hebrew Bible] tells the same reality in more detail.

Out of four entrances of the **Baitul Maqdas**, only one is opened daily but on Fridays or Eid like special days all the four doors are made open. The shoe racks are just inside the doors. No prohibition of photography or videos but

one cannot focus on women inside except of your own family. There is no *adhan* [call for prayers] in *Baitul Maqdas*; Aqsa's *adhan* is directly heard here and taken sufficient – but all the five prayers are held here separately with its own '*IMAM*' in place except for Fridays' '*Juma Prayer*'; this prayer is offered in the lead of Aqsa's *IMAM*. At *Juma* prayer times, the Haram is for the women only; no male allowed.

Inside **Haram Sharif**, the security and administrative functions are handled by the volunteer Muslim ladies. Well educated, speaking Arabic, Hebrew and English with equal proficiency - they guide the tourists skilfully and smilingly. Mostly they are teachers of girls' school situated in the Haram complex.

For visitors normally *Bab el Gharab* [Door-1] or *Bab el Jannah* [Door-2] remains open till after *Isha* prayer. Waqf closes and lock the doors of **Haram Sharif** about 15 minutes after the night prayer. On Fridays, the *Bab el Qibla* [Door-4] remains open whole day because non-Muslims are not allowed that day and mostly Muslim women from all around Palestine come there for prayers. **The niche [Mehraab]** can be seen near this door and also the stairs leading down to the cave called '**Fountain [well] of Souls**' or *Bir el Arwah* as referred earlier. Here in the cave, the visitors can touch the holy **ROCK** and feel spiritually elevated.

Just inside front of the Door-1, there are **fingerprints of the Archangel Gabriel AS** who is said to have held back the Rock when Prophet Muhammad pbuh ascended into the heaven on the '*Miraaj Night*' [cannot be seen directly due to high wooden shield in between].

Nearby in one corner of the holy rock inside Haram, there is a **small minaret in red & gold**. The people go there and put one hand inside a hole beneath it. When one takes his / her hand out, a gesture of perfumed **WAVE** accompanies for a while – it is a heavenly perfumed breeze and being so since about 15 centuries – inside there happens to be that part of rock over which the Prophet Muhammad pbuh

had placed his foot to ride '*burraq*' when going on ascension – a popular Muslim belief it is.

Just inside the *Bab es Silsilah* [Door-3], Jews call it David's Gate of Judgment; there lies a big marble slab. It is said that this slab covers **Prophet Solomon AS's Tomb**; by authentic historical notes Prophet Solomon had breathed his last in a nearby place which is in north-eastern corner at the Haram Plaza.