

The Quran and its Message

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سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ

Salamun Alaikum (Peace be upon you)

A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE WITH PRAYER AT MADINAT AL-ZAHRA (AL ANDALUS)

NEAR CORDOBA, SPAIN

Joseph A Islam

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AN EXCERPT FROM MY TRAVEL BLOG



As I absorbed the atmosphere of the picturesque surrounds, beneath the foothills of the Sierra Morena mountain ranges and in view of the Cordoba plains, I imagined what glamour Madinat al-Zahra had exuded in its heyday.

Built as a fortified city palace, Abd -ur Rahman the Umayyad Caliph of Cordoba, would have exercised much control from this location.

I attempted to visualise the opulence and architectural marvel from the ruins that lay as a stark reminder of so many Quranic narratives that capture how great powers have ended and why.

It was all so surreal. I was conscious of the time for prayer and it was departing. I wanted to thank

my Lord for every faculty he had bestowed on me, for all that He had given me. I also felt spiritually tied with the believing ancients of Cordoba that once, prayed here. All that was now left of them were memories.

I was conscious of Andalucía's history and its present. Though the glory days of Islam in Cordoba were well attested both through literary and archaeological evidence, the Reconquista and the Spanish inquisition provided an equally poignant reminder of how kingdoms were superseded and replaced. But there has always been a purpose, a Divine purpose, despite how history and man's interpretation has been recorded.

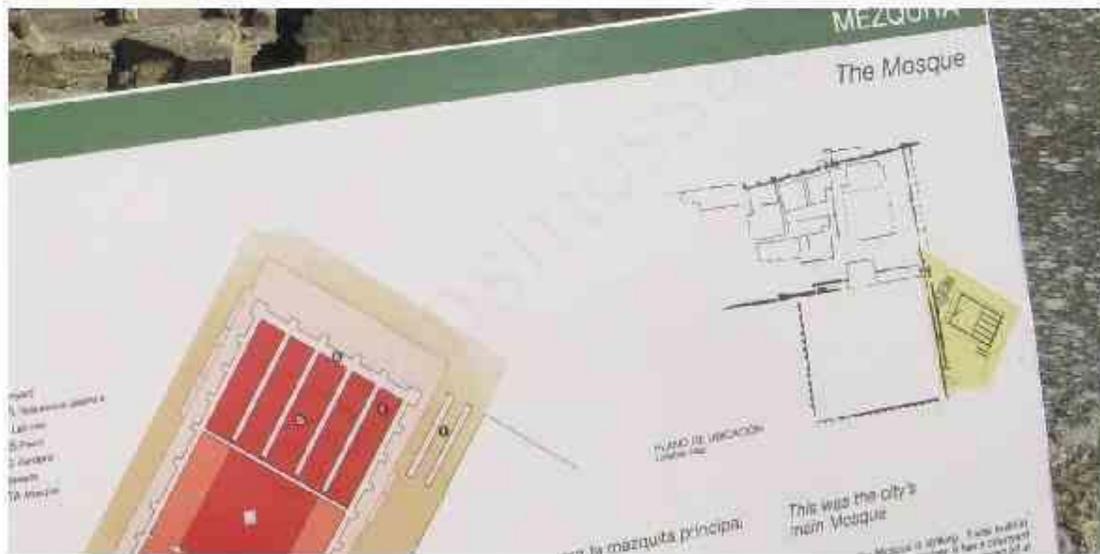
I was equally conscious of recent cases of the furore that had been caused when Muslims had attempted to pray at locations such as the Mosque-Cathedral at Cordoba. I didn't want to cause a similar scene so I left it humbly to my Lord to find me an appropriate way to fulfil my desire to worship Him and meditate.

As I strolled along, contemplating the ruins, remaining conscious of time, I walked up a makeshift bridge which skirted past some of the ruins. I thought that the somewhat serenity and privacy of the bridge may provide an ample location to quickly offer my prayers. But then, a few tourists passed, and I declined to commit.



As I was becoming resigned to my fate, that I would miss my opportunity and desire to pray, I noted some ruins in the distance.

I scrambled for my paper guide to work out what it was that I observed. Better still, I noted that there was a board with a diagram. I hurriedly moved towards it to study its information. As I approached towards it, I was awed at what I read. The ruins in front of me, with its partial walls still standing and a few palm trees within its perimeters was the old site of the palace's mosque. I was speechless.



I stood staring at the site, my eyes fixed at its orientation and the timing of my arrival as I was giving up on my desire to pray. I reached out for my digital compass and noted the alignment of the mehrab labelled as (d) on the map to the Qiblah at Makkah.

I felt a strong desire to wander over to the ruins, but it lay many meters below me in the distance with no access to it. As I watched, I noted a ledge wide enough on which I could sit legs crossed in relative safety.

As I put my travel bag aside, I sat there staring at the city of Cordoba in the distance and in the direction of the Qiblah. I closed my eyes and prayed. Albeit, I abandoned my form, given the location and the occasional tourists and security around me, my mind submitted. Each prostration was felt in my heart. Each rukuh (bowing) was as purposeful as if I had been carrying out my prayer in any of the world's mosques. It was a spiritual experience unparalleled. The occasional soft breeze checked by my cheeks and body caused me to sway gently adding to the experience of the meditation.



I had written much about the absence of prayer form in the Quran. It was today, that I was to truly experience the wisdom behind it.



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