

A Note for Indian Publication

The Board of Theological Education of the Senate of Serampore College (BTESSC) is committed to express its solidarity with the struggles of the margins in different contexts and also to compare the relationship between the margins in India like Dalits, Tribals/Adivasi and women. In the last four years, BTESSC has continuously involved in creating awareness among the churches and also within the theological community on the struggles of the Palestinian friends. In the recently held meeting in Bethlehem organized by Palestine-Israel Ecumenical Forum (PIEF), a book titled "Listening to the Living Stones: Towards Theological Explorations of Kairos Pilgrimages for Justice" was released. It is mainly related to the question of pilgrimages to the Holy Land. The author of the book analyzed theologically, politically and historically the whole issue of journeying to the Holy Land. Inspired by the book and with the permission of Alternative Tourism Group, BTESSC is bringing out an Indian version of the publication. We especially thank Prof. Rami Kassis, the Executive Director of ATG for permission for this reprint as well as for their financial support to bring out this Indian edition.

We hope this will challenge every one who reads it.

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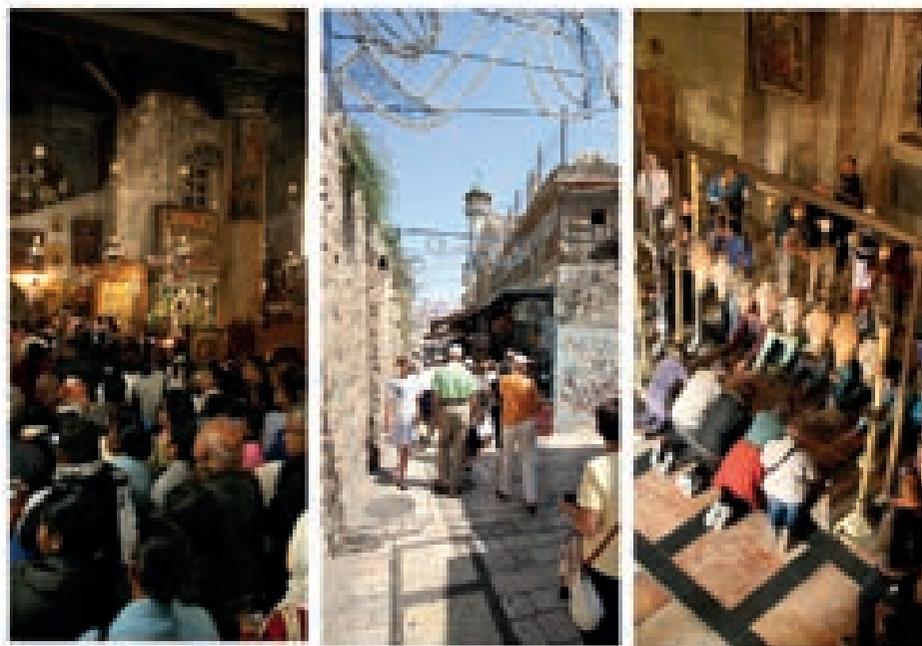
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Alternative Tourism Group- Study Center
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Listening to the

Living Stones



Towards Theological Explorations of
Kairos Pilgrimages for Justice

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Preface

The Alternative Tourism Group is pleased to publish this booklet "Listening to the Living Stones - Towards Theological Explorations of Kairos Pilgrimages for Justice"

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Our journey with this initiative began in 2005 when a group of tourism activists, human rights defenders, and theologians came together in Alexandria, Egypt to explore the meaning of what a 'Pilgrimage for Transformation' must resemble. At that meeting, we engaged in a search for how to promote the notion that tourism can be a vehicle for the international community to become advocates for peace with justice in Palestine with the goal of ending the occupation. Our search centered on the notion of justice tourism which we viewed as a method and pathway to make known the truth about the Israeli occupation and how it impacts Palestinians. When we defined tourism as a form of pilgrimage, and as a theater of opportunity for solidarity, sharing and caring, we were advancing a new paradigm of tourism within which tourism is a quest for spirituality through encounters in which humankind seeks God's truth. We sought to pursue creative ideas about global campaigns designed to bring political consciousness within the global community of oppression suffered by Palestinians in ways that would break the silence about the occupation, heighten the levels of solidarity between international partners and Palestinians and accelerate the pursuit of

freedom for Palestine through justice tourism. In Alexandria we agreed that it was important that we challenge and transform mainstream tourism and Israel monopoly over tourism in the Holy Land especially on Christian pilgrimages by offering alternative models of pilgrimage. In our understanding, a pilgrimage to the Holy Land had of necessity to be a transformational experience where a pilgrim/tourist/researcher would 'come and see' the facts-on-the-ground and return as advocates for justice to the Palestinians.

The process initiated in Alexandria moved forward with a series of encounters involving a wide array of concerned people- tourism activists, theologians, and human rights defenders. A Code of Conduct for travelers to the Holy Land was developed followed by the creation of the Palestinian Initiative for Responsible tourism (PIRT).

After the launch of the Kairos document in 2009, ATG decided to work closely with Kairos Palestine and the Palestine Israel Ecumenical Forum (PIEF) in developing Biblical and theological frameworks and bases for pilgrimages rooted in the Kairos call to "Come and See". That resulted in the joint publication of the book "Guidelines for Pilgrimage".

Now we have this document titled "Towards Theological Explorations of Kairos Pilgrimages for Justice", which ATG has published in cooperation with Kairos Palestine and PIEF.

ATG is entirely conscious that this study is but an exploration. It does not claim that the reflections and conclusions must be seen with any sort of finality. The hope, however, is that it will begin processes of wider study and reflection based on this invaluable and in-depth research that has been carried out over a period of nearly two years.

This study was first commissioned in 2012 and Rev. Raj Bharath Patta, then General Secretary of the Student Christian Movement of India, and

now a doctoral candidate at the University of Manchester visited Palestine on two different occasions. One of these was exclusively devoted to visiting villages, towns, and also to meeting with and interviewing a wide range of people. He then engaged in study/research pouring through a wide array of justice tourism literature, and books and documents that cover theological notions about pilgrimage. His explorations and studies have been applied through reflections to the situation of Palestine Israel today. We are grateful for his time and dedicated work in helping to launch what could emerge as an important field of study and research worldwide.

To the research by Rev. Raj Bharath Patta, ATG also recommends that readers visit websites of various Palestinian organizations, which offer alternative and justice tourism and are already carrying out 'Models of Pilgrimage'. These models illustrate the notions and propositions that Rev. Raj Bharath Patta makes in his study.

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ATG will pursue this study even further. In doing so, ATG will work in collaboration with other partners who seek to further investigate Biblical insights, and further reflect theologically on what pilgrimage implies for us today in the context of the Holy Land. It will continue to work with Kairos Palestine and PIEF both of which have been important and influential partners since 2010.

Rami Kassis

Executive Director
Alternative Tourism Group





Introduction

“Guide me, O thou great Jehovah, pilgrim through this barren land.
I am weak, but thou art mighty; hold me with thy powerful hand.
Bread of heaven, bread of heaven, feed me till I want no more;
feed me till I want no more.”

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This has been a popular hymn many pilgrims keep singing during their pilgrimages, and have, through it, sought comfort and solace from the divine on their journeys. Pilgrimages have been as old as the religions themselves, and have given a sense of self-edification & self-enrichment for pilgrims, across all the religions.

Over the years, there has been a growing interest for people to travel to Palestine Israel on pilgrimages, and converted tourism into a major industry. The Holy Land is a unique tourist destination - its long history, religious significance and natural beauty make it an amazing place to visit. Palestine's importance derives partly from the fact that it is home to the three monotheistic and Abrahamic religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Every year it attracts many pilgrims, people of faith and scholars who visit the holy places. Secular tourists come to explore the historical sites, Palestine's vibrant cities, rural life and natural reserves.

However, to most pilgrims the narratives that they hear in the land of the holy one are those of Israeli tour operators, who take tourists/pilgrims

only to the sites in Israel and in the name of security frighten pilgrims away from the sites in Palestine. Did we know that there exist Palestinian Arab Christians in this part of the world, and did we ever acknowledge their local Christian experience which has the possibility to strengthen the faith of pilgrims who want to walk in the foot-steps of Jesus Christ? Are we aware that these friends in Palestine have a narrative to share about the Biblical sites in their land?

In such a context, the need for an alternative tourism came into the forefront trying to explore what pilgrimage means for faith communities of our times today. There has never been an opportunity for the pilgrims on pilgrimage to holy land to listen to the experiences of the living stones, the local Palestinian communities, their narratives, their faith experiences, their stories and their lives for reasons known and unknown, and therefore alternative pilgrimage is envisaged as a way to listen to the unheard voices of the living stones. Here is an attempt to decipher that alternative pilgrimage, justice pilgrimage, which is a creative response to the changing signs of our times today. This book is meant for the Christian faith communities who embark on a pilgrimage to be sensitive to the living stones, and therefore provides a glimpse of the political context of Palestine Israel, a context of Kairos Palestine and then attempts to bring out the theological contours in understanding justice pilgrimage. Historical and Biblical perspectives on pilgrimages are discussed here; an attempt on the theology of pilgrimage is done here with God as a co-companion in our pilgrimage and then the relevance of such pilgrimages are also discussed here. This book is not an end in itself, but a starting point, a beginning to unravel justice pilgrimage, with a lone focus for pilgrimage is to encounter the living God by engaging with the living stones.