

# Lecturer's Contribution

**Poisson d'avril**  
by Seng Hui Zanne



"Here's some great news for students: No final exam for this semester!  
...Poisson d'avril !"

When you look at the sentence above, you might wonder about the meaning of 'poisson d'avril'. In case you have never heard the term before, it means I played a trick on you. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of April, people celebrate April Fools' Day by playing practical jokes with each other. When the jokes are discovered, we say "April Fool!". The French do the same. They say "poisson d'avril" (poisson: fish; d'avril: of April). Why a fish? There are a lot of theories but no one really knows the reason behind it. However, when we talk about the 1<sup>st</sup> of April itself, we won't call it "poisson d'avril", we will just call it "le premier avril" (the first of April).

On April Fools' Day, the French might play all different kinds of pranks on unsuspecting victims just like other countries. Nonetheless, the French have a traditional prank involving a fish. A common prank among French kids is sticking a paper fish on someone's back. Kids will try all their best to stick paper fish on their friends', parents' or even teachers' backs unnoticed. Once the prank is successful, the kids run away and yell out "poisson d'avril, poisson d'avril".



**Once Upon a Time in Jerusalem**  
by Dr. Isma Noornisa Ismail

So let's face it. The Movement Control Order (MCO) has been extended yet and yet again. Travel bans are still in effect and the hope for travel junkies seems so bleak. The only trip we can make now is just to and from home to the supermarkets. Therefore, to ease the longing in our hearts, let's do a major throwback. And for me, the most memorable one I've ever had was a mother-daughter trip to Jerusalem, Palestine in 2012. It was just a short trip, and happened almost a decade ago, but I can still remember almost every detail.

My mum and I were invited to join the trip by our relative, and it was on such short notice but we agreed on a whim as such opportunities do not come by easily. It's no news that Jerusalem has always been embroiled in conflicts leading to violence and blood sheds, which of course, made us nervous about this trip. However, our curiosity got the better of us and we decided to take the chances anyway. We began our journey with a flight from Penang to Jordan and proceeded with a bus to the border of Palestine via the King Hussein/ Allenby Bridge. This was where we first witnessed the disdain from the Jewish military. We were held back for nothing while watching tour buses from other countries easily permitted to pass through. While waiting, we were not allowed to take photos, however, one man in our tour group discreetly recorded some, probably thinking that he could outwit the Jewish authorities. Within minutes, the bus was suddenly filled with heavily armed Jews and they seized that man for interrogations. The whole bus was also ransacked by them – luggage, seats, everything! and after more than 8 hours of agonizing wait, the captured man was released, and we were finally allowed to enter the Palestinian border.



*My mom (the main sponsor of this trip) and I on the Karm-el Mountain, overlooking the Dead Sea.*



*The Wailing Wall of the Western Plaza*



*The majestic Dome of the Rock*

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We passed by the lowest point on earth before proceeding to Jericho, the oldest city in the world – also known as the city of the moon. The journey was unique as we can see the stark differences between Israel's highly advanced developments and the run-down area populated by Palestinians. Upon entering Jerusalem, we were all fascinated by the sight of the al-Aqsa complex (it's not just a mosque – the whole complex area is called al-Aqsa), and the majestic Dome of the Rock. The feeling of being inside the complex was indescribable. Stepping foot in the place steeped in history, where our prophets used to be, and many were even laid to rest here. It was also the Muslim's first qibla, and among the mosques mentioned in the Quran. Despite the elated feeling for being able to step inside al-Aqsa, I couldn't help but to feel sad as well. As tourists, we were allowed to enter the complex, but for Palestinians, only females and older males were allowed inside as the entrance was heavily guarded by the Jewish army. Not everyone can go in and out freely inside the complex, and just a few days prior to our arrival – there were firearms attacks and we could still see the holes in the walls and poles of al-Aqsa due to those attacks (which actually happen frequently).

Another interesting fact about Jerusalem is that is the place where three of the world's major religions originated – Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. The old city of Jerusalem is also divided into four quarters - Muslim, Christian, Jewish, as well as the Armenian quarters. During our trip, we managed to see the ancient remnants of these religions, for example the Wailing Wall or the Western Wall Plaza (within the Aqsa complex) which is sacred for the Jewish, the birth place of Virgin Mary just outside of the complex, and of course the historical Qubah as-Sakhrah (Dome of the Rock) where the Prophet Muhammad ascended to heaven during his night journey with Angel Gabriel (Isra' Mikraj). The al-Aqsa complex also housed more than one mosque, as there were intricate underground tunnels which led to some other mosques, as well as the famed King Solomon's temple located in the Jewish section of the complex. We also saw numerous tombs of other prophets, Muslim scholars, and warriors in several cities outside Jerusalem, however, we were not allowed to enter Tel Aviv (the capital of Israel) and Gaza (special permission needed to enter).

This journey was definitely unforgettable, especially when I recalled the look in the eyes of the Palestinian children, orphaned by the never ending wars. These fearless kids were always ready with rocks and pebbles in their hands, to be thrown to Jewish soldiers who invaded their homes and took away their families. How I wished there was something I could do for them, or anything to give them. Some of our trip members were more well-equipped, they brought along jars of candies to give the kids and they were so ecstatic!

We managed to perform *fajr* prayers on three consecutive days in al-Aqsa before finally saying goodbye and proceeded to Madinah for our umrah journey. This is my definition of absolute journey because truth be told, even though I would love to go there again, I doubt this kind of experience will ever come my way once more. Thus, it will forever be cherished in my heart.



*The interior of Masjid al-Qibli (inside al-Aqsa)*



*The Birthplace of Virgin Mary*