EXPANDED ISSUE

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Inside

The Meanings of the Kotel

The Wall, or the Kotel, is a mere 187 feet in length and 62 feet in height — a fraction of the 1,600 foot-long remnant of the Second Temple. This collection of stones has been, time and again, the focal point of great contention: In 1929, when riots erupted there that sent shock-waves throughout the Jewish world, and today, as Women of the Wall demands ritual equity at this site. The Wall is simultaneously a spiritual oasis, a place for reverence and prayer, and a fraught symbol, a flashpoint for anger and recrimination.

How truly significant a symbol should this Wall be in Judaism and Jewish life? Is the Wall, post-1967, more about Jewish nationalism than Jewish faith? Why has the battle waged by Women of the Wall (and countered by Women for the Wall) sparked such fierce reactions? This issue of *Sh'ma* examines these and other questions about the Wall's history — its construction, its archeology, and the creation of the Wall's plaza where visitors congregate. It includes six thoughtful and diverse viewpoints on the "Women of the Wall" movement. Our infographic on pages 12-13 is our attempt to visually represent a few key facts about this almost instantly recognizable structure in a readily accessible format, upending (we hope) some assumptions along the way.

At the heart of this issue is another question: What does it mean to call a place holy? I've asked several contributors to reflect on this question.

Also in this issue, in the second of our yearlong series on the ethics of parenting, Joanna Samuels considers the implications and invisibility of privilege.

— Susan Berrin, Editor-in-Chief

The Kotel: Contested Sacred Space

ARIEH SAPOSNIK

In June 2013, spurred by tentative Israeli plans for new changes at the Western Wall compound, the Palestinian Authority's Minister for Religious Affairs Mahmoud Al Habash, cautioned that "any change in the Temple Mount is unacceptable to the Palestinians or Arabs. It's a change of our heritage site and I believe that such a change will push us toward a new conflict."

To anyone familiar with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the often painful place that the Western Wall-Temple Mount area has in it, this might hardly sound new. Dating back at least to the 1920s, as both Zionism and the emerging Palestinian national movement increasingly placed this holy site at the center of their respective national identities, any perceived change to the status quo at the site has aroused bitter and sometimes bloody confrontations. What was striking in this case, however, was that the cause of this new tension had seemingly little to do with Jewish-Muslim or Israeli-Palestinian relations. It was, rather, a Jewish Agency for Israel plan to designate a section of the Wall compound for the egalitarian prayer services of multi-denominational Jewish groups, in particular, the Women of the Wall. What had provoked the Palestinian response, in other words, was a conflict within Jewish Israel over the legitimacy of particular rituals at the Wall.

The Western Wall is widely held to be the "most sacred place in the world to the Jewish people," as the website of Israel's Ministry of Tourism puts it — a notion that evokes both historical continuity and a sense of universal Jewish unity. In fact, however, the Wall has been a site of contention among Jews for decades, a central axis around which two of the overarching and defining questions of Jewish identity in the modern world have come together — and come to a head. It has been at the very heart of struggles over questions of Jewish religiosity, ritual, and authority. And it has played a leading role in the changing relationships between Jews and non-Jews, which Zionism and other modern Jewish political movements set out to refashion, often by addressing a third modern Jewish dilemma — the thorny question of Jews, power, and morality.

Although the Wall had been a site of Jewish pilgrimage and prayer for centuries, only beginning in the 19th century — first,

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with the so-called rediscovery of the Holy Land by the Christian West, and later, with the rise of Zionism — did the Wall and its symbolism emerge as central in some of the profound changes taking place in Jewish life. First, as Christian interest in the Holy Land began to grow in the 19th century, "the Jews' Wailing Place," as it was most frequently referred to, was depicted as a site of mourning, destruction, and degradation that was in many ways a confirmation of traditional Christian theological views. To many early Zionists, the Wall was similarly seen as a symbol of degradation and destruction — a site for "exilic" Jews to mourn, weep, and wail. They sought to create a different Jerusalem, and by the first decade of the 20th century, one resident could speak of two distinct cities — a living new, modern, Western city, contrasted with "the dead Western Wall." For many Jews, in other words, the Western Wall was not a site relevant to the renaissance of Jewish life, but rather a retrograde stronghold of archaic rites and an outdated orthodoxy.

Things began to change in the wake of World War I, with the critical turning point surrounding the 1929 riots. This outbreak of violence — unprecedented in scope and casualties — reflected the growing centrality of the Wall in a changing Zionism and in the Jewish world, as well as within the now crystallizing Palestinian Arab national movement. With tensions escalating, the Wall was increasingly adopted as a central Zionist symbol. No longer a manifestation of exile, destruction, and degradation, the Kotel was increasingly perceived as "the Wall of Heroes," as one prominent journalist had called it — a radically different representation than had been common in the past. The Wall had not merely been adopted; it had been transformed into an entirely new symbol, redolent with new meanings and a new sacredness that stood in stark contrast to its traditional Jewish holiness. New rituals were fashioned for the site in this process, at once generating and communicating the new, modern sacrality now associated with it. Inevitably, these, in turn, entailed (and continue to entail) further struggle.

By the early 1930s, the Wall had been transformed from a site of ultra-Orthodox mournful prayer largely shunned by Zionists and other non-Orthodox Jews, to an all-Jewish site, resonating with a new symbolism of sacred heroism at once ancient and new. It was not an accident that it was precisely around this time that the common appellation "the Jews' Wailing Place" was replaced with the designation "Western Wall," a translation of the Hebrew *"Kotel Ma'aravi."*

Its new status as a religio-national sacred site would naturally make the Wall a site of new frictions and contestation, a central axis in many of the struggles over shifting understandings of Judaism and Jewishness that have characterized Jewish life in Israel and the Diaspora over subsequent decades. These have found expression in a number of developments — the rise and decline of military swearing-in ceremonies at the Wall, battles over archeological excavation between Israel's Antiquities Authority and Haredi groups and between Israel and the Palestinians, and competing approaches among archeologists themselves. Perhaps most familiar to Jews outside of Israel, these frictions have also found expression in the campaigns by liberal Jewish groups to carve out both physical and figurative space at the Wall compound (which, like Israel itself, was dramatically transformed after 1967) for their own versions of Jewish ritual and identity.

The sacred nature of a site such as the Kotel seems to suggest (and to beg for) an absolute. But the sacred, as it turns out, has many faces. The Jewish encounter with modernity, moreover, brought with it a Jewish politics that was based on a profound sense of rupture, a splintering of Jewish identities. The multiple meanings of the Western Wall and the ongoing struggles for the sacred it represents are, in this sense, faithful reflections of the trajectory of modern Jewish history and integral pieces of its unfolding drama.

Can Stones Be Holy?

What is the point of Judaism, if not to redeem us from worshipping "wood and stone"? Standing in the Kotel plaza, squinting in the harsh Mediterranean sun, I see that the Kotel is visibly darker about two feet above the ground. That darker strip is where visitors, pilgrims, tourists, and davenners (prayer-sayers) have placed their hands on the stones. They have come face-to-face with the Kotel, perhaps standing awkwardly, perhaps pouring out their hearts, or perhaps simply reaching out their palms to feel its cool touch. In return, they have left on the stones a strip of human touch and human prayer — a monument to human aspiration. I don't know if the stones themselves are holy. But the residue from all those hands — that, I know, is holy.

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The Western Wall: An Arabian Gift

MOSHE SOKOLOW

The survival of the Western Wall alone among the four retaining walls of the Herodian Temple Mount invites inquiry. Was it accidental or intentional? And, either way, what are we to make of it?

A search for *ha-kotel ha-ma'aravi* in the compendious Bar-Ilan University data base indicates that the term — when applied to the "Western Wall" as it is understood today, rather than as a designation for one of the four principal facades of the Temple — has been in use for only about a century, and its appearances are limited almost exclusively to contemporary responsa literature.

Historically, the earliest dated reference to the Western Wall appears in the itinerary of a Christian pilgrim from Bordeaux who visited Jerusalem in 333 C.E. The Emperor Constantine had banished Jews from Jerusalem and forbidden them to live even within sight of the city. Only on Tisha b'Av were they permitted to enter, briefly, and approach the Western Wall: "to which the Jews come every year, and anoint it, and lament themselves with moans and tear their clothes, and thus depart."

While the Wall was clearly identifiable in the 4th century, it did not make its premier appearance in a Jewish source until about the 7th century. The Midrash Rabbah 1:5 on the book of Lamentations *(Eikhah)* tells the story of the Roman emperor Vespasian, who spent 3½ years besieging Jerusalem. After conquering the city, he divided the destruction of the four city walls among four of his dukes, with the Western Wall falling to the Duke of Arabia. Three of the dukes destroyed their lots but the Duke of Arabia maintained his. When Vespasian summoned him to ask why he had not destroyed his lot, he replied: "Had I destroyed my lot as the others destroyed theirs, the kings who will succeed you would never know what a great edifice you destroyed. Since I did not destroy it, however, your successors will be able to see it and they will say, 'Look at the great edifice he destroyed.'"

A contemporary Midrash Rabbah to *Shir ha-Shirim* (2:9) on the verse "Behold he stands behind our wall" *(kotelenu)* states: "Behind the Western Wall of the Temple, for God had sworn that it would never be destroyed." It had been decreed in heaven that the Western Wall would never be destroyed because the Divine Presence *(Shekhinah)* resides in the west.

In answer to our opening question, the implication of these midrashic sources is that the survival of the Western Wall was both accidental and intentional. The Duke of Arabia may have been acting under a selfish impulse to glorify the Roman conquest, but he was only acting out a role that had been preordained for him by God. (In the midrashic account, Vespasian sentences the duke to a cruel death; though the ruler is pleased with the vainglorious explanation, he is miffed by the violation of his direct order.)

Crediting the Duke of Arabia with the survival of the Western Wall is not accidental, either; it seems, rather, to reflect the zeitgeist of the period during which this midrash was probably written. In 638 C.E., the Caliph Umar conquered Jerusalem from the Byzantine Christians. A Muslim Hadith (midrash) reports: "When Umar bin al-Khattab conquered Jerusalem, he found a lot of garbage on the [Foundation] Rock that had been deposited by the Christians *[al-Rum]* to vex the Jews *[Bani Isra'il]*. Umar spread out his cloak, collected the garbage, and instructed the other Muslims to collect it with him."

This theme reprises itself in a Sephardic Jewish folktale about the Ottoman Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent. Upon conquering Jerusalem in the 16th century, he saw that people were coming from as far away as Bethlehem to dump garbage on a particular site on the Temple Mount. Suleiman responded by strewing gold coins about the refuse. As people began to dig in search of the coins, the mound of detritus dwindled, the Western Wall gradually emerged from beneath it, and the sultan had it anointed with rose water.

Paradoxically, then, we have both an early classical Jewish source and a relatively late Jewish folktale acknowledging a debt to Arabs for the survival of the Western Wall — something that ought to give us pause as we contemplate the contemporary state of Jewish-Muslim relations, in general, and the contentious status of the Western Wall plaza and the Temple Mount, in particular.

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Toward Sacred Dignity

BONNA DEVORA HABERMAN

ובהיכלו כלו אמר כבוד
"In the sanctuary, everyone exclaims '*kavod.*'"
Psalm 29:9

Border police and metal barriers have encircled Women of the Wall (WoW) during recent Rosh Chodesh gatherings. Some ultra-Orthodox men and women congregate alongside — not to pray, but to blow whistles, shout insults, and carry placards (acts that contravene statutes governing holy sites, which forbid protests and demonstrations). Many onlookers are curious, and they take photos, even videos; some debate with our male supporters. Within the enclosure, we celebrate each new month. We name new babies and dance with *b'not mitzvah* on our shoulders. Israeli women bless and chant the Torah for the first time. Many shades of Jewish women join in spirited prayers. Among thousands of young seminary women bused in at their rabbis' behest to fill the plaza and prevent our entry, some gawk at our *tefillin* and *tallitot*. Some are aroused by the subversive possibility of women's autonomous public prayer. We have even had the honor of welcoming a few ultra-Orthodox young women into our feminist circle. One such woman, buttoned to the neck and stockinged to the toe stood by me intoning our foremothers' names in her quiet petitions. There is a vital generation of Israelis who are committed to Women of the Wall, and a growing base of Israeli support. A recent poll indicates, "48 percent of Israeli Jews back the Women of the Wall."[1]

Women of the Wall catalyzes engagement in healthy democracy. We query the role of religion in civil society and its form in sacred space, the limits of freedom and coercion, and propose ethical practices for Judaism. This controversy is on the current Israeli agenda. "Women of the Wall" has become an everyday phrase in homes and on the street, at schools, on campus, in youth groups, on TV and radio. Groups convene in the Knesset to discuss and consult about the challenges and opportunities that Women of the Wall presents to Israel. Israeli Minister of Justice Tzipi Livni defies Minister of Religious Services Naftali Bennett's proposal to amend the law to exclude women's prayer with *tallit, tefillin,* and Torah from the status quo at the Kotel.

Much has been made of Judge Moshe Sobel's April 2013 Jerusalem District Court decision. Upholding the lawfulness of WOW's practice as part of the diverse customs at the Kotel, it is a bold ruling that focuses conversation on religious pluralism and clarifies main points in our legal process:

1) State policy and actions against Women of the Wall have been based on a mistaken interpretation of the Israeli Supreme Court ruling. In 2003, the Supreme Court ordered the state to prepare a respectable prayer area at the Robinson's Arch site for Women of the Wall within 12 months. With that condition unfulfilled, the state is required to protect the women's prayers as petitioned, in the women's section at the Western Wall.

2) The state has no legal grounds or justification to threaten, harass, detain, or arrest women who pray together with *tallit, tefillin* and who read from a Torah scroll. These are not (criminal) offenses, nor do they threaten public order.

3) The statute enacted by the state in response to our original Supreme Court petition of 1989 cannot be interpreted according to Haredi or other partisan interests to exclude or prohibit the prayers of Women of the Wall.

Prompted by outrage at detentions and arrests of Women of the Wall for praying with *tallitot*, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu asked Natan Sharansky, chair of the executive of the Jewish Agency for Israel, to negotiate a compromise. Sharansky's plan proposes to exile Women of the Wall from the core sacred site where Jews gather for prayer to the Robinson's Arch archeological site, an existing egalitarian area separated from the main Kotel plaza by the ramp to the Mughrabi Gate on the Temple Mount. In addition to consolidating opposition to women's prayer at the Kotel, this plan would further legitimize the ultra-Orthodox agenda that erases women from public visibility and silences women's voices, denies women's autonomy in marriage and divorce, and enforces gender separation and rear seating on public and private buses. Capitulating to this approach at the Kotel would degrade our sacred places and the quality of our civil society. The Kotel with women's active, visible public prayer and leadership is inextricable from an Israel with women's active, visible public participation and leadership.

Bonna Devora Haberman is the Israeli initiator of Women of the Wall. She is the author of National Book award finalist *Rereading Israel: The Spirit of the Matter* and *Israeli Feminism Liberating Judaism: Blood and Ink.* Haberman has taught at Harvard, Brandeis and Hebrew universities. She currently co-directs YTheater Project Jerusalem, a collaboration between an ardent Zionist and a Palestinian nationalist who agree about virtually nothing.

[1] The poll was conducted by the Israel Democracy Institute and Tel Aviv University in May 2013.

The Israeli founder of Women of the Wall, I also work with Palestinians in creative collaboration. There are parallels between these initiatives. We might not succeed to convince the *other* to agree with us, but we can learn to live together with dignity and mutual concern. In his response to our original petition, Justice Shlomo Levine of the Israeli Supreme Court emphasized the responsibility of state officials to create an ambiance conducive to balancing opposing interests in order to maximize the fulfillment of freedom without excessive harm to people's sensitivities. Our state can choose policies that lead toward accommodation, honor difference, and promote respect among women and men, among many shades of Jewish practice, and among Israelis and Palestinians.

Women of the Wall invokes a uniquely diverse Jewish expression at the exquisitely simple remnant of our ancient Temple. Our festive prayers, song, and dancing contribute toward a fuller understanding of who is a Jew and what is Israel. Women wrapped in *tallitot* of many colors, adorned with *tefillin*, reading from the Torah scroll — these are now more familiar images of who a Jew can be: a responsible member and leader of *her* people. An Israel that includes, honors, and embraces fully women's and men's participation — this is a now a more familiar vision of what Israel can become.

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Women at the Wall: An Agent of Contention

LEAH AHARONI

What image comes to mind when I say "Judaism"? During a recent meeting with a group of American college students on a Birthright Israel trip, "the Western Wall" was their instantaneous response. More often than not, Israelis, both secular and religiously observant, give the same answer.

The power of the Kotel to unite Jews is so strong that it trumps even the splintering of Israeli society and the interdenominational disputes of the Diaspora. "The Divine Presence never leaves the Western Wall." (Shmot Raba 22) This Divine presence hinges on a metaphysical concept, *knesset Yisrael* (the assembly of Israel), which views the entire Jewish people as one spiritual entity, manifest in separate people. (Kedushat Halevi)

For the past 1,700 years, Jews have chosen various spots along the Western Wall as the sites of prayer closest to the remains of the Holy Temple. The tradition of prayer here has always been what would be called Orthodox, since none other had existed in Israel until recent decades. The contention that the Kotel had never been an Orthodox synagogue, because it never had a *mechitzah* (divider) doesn't take into account the Ottoman and later British ban on constructing a *mechitzah* or bringing Jewish symbols to the Kotel. In fact, when the otherwise secular prestate Zionist resistance movements wanted to affirm Jewish sovereignty at the Kotel, they did so by putting up a *mechitzah.*

However, this universal Jewish reverence for the Kotel is not shared by the leadership of the liberal movements. The Council of Progressive Rabbis in Israel (Reform) ruled in 1999 that the Kotel has no intrinsic sanctity. Likewise, Reform Rabbi Jeffrey Goldwasser, wrote, "[T]he Western Wall is as holy as the heart you bring to it, just like every other place."[1] Even Josh Margo, missions and events director at the World Council of Conservative Synagogues, who came out to support Women of the Wall during a recent Rosh Chodesh event, commented that the Kotel is "just a wall."[2]

It is this gap between the feelings of the followers and the ideology of the leadership that enables Women of the Wall to manipulate the Kotel for a political agenda. WoW's chairwoman, Anat Hoffman, has suggested that among the group's objectives is to obtain Israeli government recognition for the liberal movements.[3] When asked by an Israeli reporter a few weeks ago about her feelings for the Kotel, Hoffman called the site an "opportunity."[4]

Though I may not agree with WoW's political agenda, in a liberal democracy like Israel, any group is free to push for changes in government policy through the courts and the Knesset. However, exploiting a place held sacred by millions of Jews around the world and playing into these feelings without sharing them is simply unethical.

The Kotel is one of the few places of consensus in an otherwise splintered Israeli

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Leah Aharoni is a co-founder of the grassroots movement Women For The Wall (WomenForTheWall.org), which is dedicated to preserving the sanctity and tradition of the Western Wall in the spirit of Jewish unity. A business coach, she helps female entrepreneurs build profitable and emotionally rewarding businesses. Aharoni lives with her husband and six children in a suburb of Jerusalem.

[1] See Rabbi Jeffrey Goldwasser's blog of January 24, 2013 on reformjudaism.org.

[2] See YouTube interview with Josh Margo, "Women at the Wall Rosh Chodesh Tammuz 5773."

[3] See YouTube interview with Anat Hoffman on BBC, published on Feb 12, 2013.

[4] http://womenofthewall.org.il/2013/07/talking-to-the-wall/ paragraph 14

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society. It bolsters the Jewish identity of swaths of Diaspora Jews who have little or no Jewish knowledge and affiliation. Turning this site into a battlefield transforms the Wall from a powerful magnet into a place of contention.

The Kotel is a spiritual home and a place of worship to hundreds of thousands of Jewish women who come to pray near its stones every day of the year, the vast majority of whom revere the ancient traditions of the place. It would behoove a "women's rights" group such as WoW, with less than 300 regular worshippers, to consider the desires and needs of the women who are regular denizens of the Wall. Yet, rather than respecting the traditions of these women, WoW presumes to "model to all Jewish women … that women can take control over their own religious lives]."[5]

Understanding the need for dialogue, in the past months our group has made attempts to initiate discussions with WoW, both directly and via third parties. WoW rejected our attempts at conversation, including one mediated by Gesher, an organization that aims to promote cooperation between Israel's religious and non-religious streams.[6]

The Israeli Supreme Court put forth a compromise to allow WoW to pray undisturbed at Robinson's Arch, a different section of the Western Wall. The fate of that plan — as well as the compromise brokered by Natan Sharansky — remains unclear.[7]

The Robinson's Arch section of the Kotel is used by the groups interested in praying at the Kotel in non-traditional ways. Though the site needs some technical improvements, it is a worthy alternative, one that enables the women of Women of the Wall to pray as they wish without upsetting the existing traditions of the Kotel or disturbing the overwhelming majority of worshippers. Considering the tiny size of WoW's prayer group and the investments made for its sake until now, the Israeli government has been quite accommodating.

Women of the Wall and its leaders are passionate about their cause. But as the group works toward religious recognition, it is my fervent prayer that these women do not turn the Wall into another pile of stones for all of us.

[5] See *Times of Israel*, http://blogs.timesofisrael.com/why-wow-should-pray-together-with-haredi-women/

[6] The organization Gesher approached me and Ronit Peskin, the other cofounder, with the request.

[7] See "Rabbis-offer-plan-for-non-Orthodox- prayer-at-Wall" in JPost.com Dec 27, 2012.

Made in America, Grown in Israel

PNINA LAHAV

The story of Women of the Wall (WoW) begins in the United States. It is now an Israeli affair, attracting considerable attention in the American Jewish community as well as in major American media. Even though the political and legal mechanics of any resolution to this problem will take place in Israel, the matter will be resolved in the United States.

The genesis of Jewish women's empowerment, and their seeking authority to congregate as a group and to pray communally, began in the U.S. feminist (and later Jewish feminist) movements of the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Thereafter, in 1988, a conference of Jewish women met in Jerusalem. Rivka Haut, one of the leaders of the Orthodox *tefillah* group movement in New York, persuaded several of the attendees to go with her to the Kotel. They borrowed a Torah scroll, went into the section reserved for women, put on *tallitot,* and began to sing, pray, and read from the Torah. Some of the women who went with them were Israeli attendees at the conference. Among the Israelis was Anat Hoffman, who is now an active and vocal leader of the Women of the Wall in Israel. At that moment, the alliance between North American and Israeli women concerned with equal access to religious life in Israel was born.

The women who went to the Wall knew that their action was unexpected and unorthodox. But they thought the State of Israel would be on their side; they expected that if some trouble or resistance took place, Israeli secular law, including its law enforcement apparatus, the police, would support them.

What made them expect support? Over the past century, Israel has been portrayed as a place upholding gender equality ("Israeli women serve in the army") and the free exercise of religion. These women — nurtured by the American values of pluralism and the growing support, even among the Orthodox, of prayer groups for women — saw themselves as pioneers in the pursuit of modernizing Judaism in Israel.

The State of Israel, on the other hand — its society, laws, and culture — has actually had a rather uneven relationship with gender equality (Israeli feminism was just beginning to reawaken on the heels of the American women's movement). And the state's understanding of

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Holy Space

"Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy!…" howled Allen Ginsberg in 1955 "Everything is holy! Everybody's holy! everywhere is holy! everyday is in eternity! Everyman's an angel!"*

Holy space is space that allows us to see and feel interconnection — that part of our emotional and biological reality that draws us to love and community, cooperation and exaltation, universalism and the yearning for redemption. It's not the space itself that is the embodiment of holiness — an idolatrous misperception that, I'm sad to say, fills the streets of Jerusalem and especially the Kotel as much as it fills the Las Vegas Strip. No, the space is simply a catalyst that, for one reason or another, awakens our recognition of everywhere and everybody as *HaMakom*, the Place.

Lawrence Bush is editor of *Jewish Currents* and author of *Waiting for God: The Spiritual Explorations of a Reluctant Atheist.*

*"Footnote to Howl," Allen Ginsberg, *Collected Poems,* 1947-1980, (HarperCollins Publishers, Inc.)

religion has been fundamentally different from the American Jewish conception. In Israel, religion is mostly an Orthodox practice controlled by Orthodox rabbis.

In the 1980s, Israeli society was divided between a large secular camp that was either indifferent or hostile to religion and a small Orthodox camp wedded to a conservative tradition. The Reform movement was barely recognized, and the Conservative movement was treated as an offshoot of the Reform movement. Most Israelis in the late 1980s had little empathy for any form of Jewish worship — including women's prayer groups.

Since 1967, when Israel gained control of the Kotel, the site has been construed as an Orthodox synagogue. The plaza in front of the Kotel was divided by a *mechitzah*, and an Orthodox rabbi was vested with authority to administer the area.

The rabbi of the Kotel, as well as the worshippers, men and women, were utterly stunned by the initial visits of Women of the Wall. They felt that outsiders were bringing heretical behavior to the holy site. They refused to entertain the idea that some of these women were Orthodox (albeit Modern Orthodox), and that halakhically they were within the four corners of Jewish law.

Since their initial forays to pray at the Kotel, the women of WoW have been met with considerable and ugly violence. The police did not come to their rescue. The Israeli government, in need of Orthodox political support domestically, wanted the women to go away.

The women, some of them veterans of the civil rights and feminist movements in the United States, were familiar with civic action and mobilization. In the United States, an organization called the International Committee of the Women of the Wall (ICWOW) was established. In Israel, Anat Hoffman, along with other activists, such as Bonna Devora Haberman, established an Israeli WoW organization.

In the 1990s, Israel's High Court of Justice was actively developing a jurisprudence of rights (following the American example of the Warren Court); therefore, WoW had reason to believe that the court would recognize their right to pray at the Kotel.[1] Striving to be modest and accommodating, the group asked only for permission to pray on Rosh Chodesh, once a month, at 7 a.m. for about two hours. However, the group did not take into consideration three factors: first, the power of Orthodoxy in Israel; second, the depth and extent of gender inequality in Israel (the issue of WoW looked too exotic to most Israelis, even trivial); and finally, the High Court's reluctance to spend its capital on this issue.

At first, and to some extent still today, the Israeli public viewed Women of the Wall as either American or "Reform" — that is, as a group of outsiders. And the American Jewish establishment seemed reluctant to come to the group's aid, which would mean exposing Israel as a state that excludes women from its holy sites that are sacred to all Jews, and a state that tolerates police violence against women.

Over the course of almost 15 years, Israel's High Court of Justice has issued three opinions. In each, Anat Hoffman was the petitioner. In each opinion, the court urged the government to accommodate the women, but it did not go as far as ordering the government to let the women pray as a group. The government established several commissions, all composed of men, and each one dragged its feet. Eventually, one of the commissions recommended that the

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[1] WoW was represented by the feminist Israeli attorney Frances Raday.

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group could be allowed to pray, but only at an adjacent area known as Robinson's Arch (an archeological garden close to the Wall).

Over the past several years, the Israelis involved with WoW have launched a social media campaign. They developed an inviting website that is frequented by women from around the world. They have a newsletter and a Facebook page, and they are on Twitter. They bombard the Israeli government with petitions, and they leverage their allies in the United States. For example, when Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu visited the United States recently, the WoW newsletter asked its subscribers to sign a petition asking the prime minister: "Why is it that my daughter cannot have her bat mitzvah at the Kotel?" How can the prime minister insist that "we are one people, one religion" when Orthodox rabbis deny young girls a bat mitzvah at the Kotel, treating the ritual as heresy? The petition touched the hearts of many American Jews.

Today, WoW is supported by all denominations, and they are leveraging more pressure against the Israeli government to resolve the issue. As the women of WoW gained attention, they became more willing to take greater risks. Last year, for reasons that are not entirely clear, the police detained some women at the Kotel. Photos of a woman who had been taken into policy custody while wrapped in a *tallit* were disseminated over the Internet. In the past few months, members of Women of the Wall, emboldened by the support they have received abroad, and by the fact that social media enables them to communicate events in real time, have begun appearing at the Wall in greater numbers. Among those attending are Israeli women who, until recently, were not interested in this matter and women from abroad who experience the matter as a violation of their rights.

The movement is gaining momentum and support. In April 2013, Judge Moshe Sobel of the District Court of Jerusalem stated that restraining orders against women trying to pray at the Kotel were illegal. He held that group prayer is not in violation of the concept of "*minhag hamakom*" (custom of the place) because this concept should be interpreted as secular, pluralistic, and national rather than as a strictly religious concept.[2] As of this writing, Minister of Religious Services Naftali Bennett is negotiating a compromise prepared by Natan Sharansky, the head of the Jewish Agency for Israel (as representative of the Jewish people) to resolve this issue. Netanyahu is eager to resolve the issue because American public opinion is becoming increasingly hostile toward the obstruction of women's prayer. The recent appointment of Tzipi Livni as minister of justice (to replace the religious and conservative Yaacov Neeman) also helps the movement.

Technically, the fate of Women of the Wall is in the hands of Israeli decision makers. Yet these decision makers cannot but feel the heat coming from the United States. Any effort to sacrifice these women will risk raising the discomfort of American Jewry. The courage to introduce change, and the willingness to grant gender equality, are nurtured and strengthened by most American Jews, both men and women. If they continue to voice their unhappiness at the fact that Jewish women are not allowed to pray as a group at the Wall, the Israeli government will feel the need to accommodate them. It is in this sense that a story that began in the United States will end in the United States, even though the subject matter is the Western Wall in Jerusalem.

Diaspora Jews will thus gain a voice in determining how Israel administers the places sacred to all Jews. Yet, while they win this concession, they will lose their ability to claim that they support Israel as a state, regardless of its policies. Here, they must take a stand on the substance of policy and acknowledge that Israel is sometimes wrong, and that criticism is sometimes appropriate and healthy. It may well bring about a new stage in the evolving relations between Israel and world Jewry, perhaps even a maturity we have never witnessed before.

[2] See Pnina Lahav, *Women of the Wall: A Temporary but Meaningful Milestone, Hamishpat* Online: Human Rights – Insight Into Recent Judgments 9 | June 2013 http://www.colman.ac.il/research/research_institute/katedra_HumanRights/Psika/Documents/9/9_june_2013_3_Lahav_EN.pdf

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I Cannot Stand with Women of the Wall

ARYEH COHEN

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The story of Women of the Wall begins with the Wall. The story of the contemporary Wall begins with the Six-Day War in June of 1967. It begins not on June 7, when the Old City was captured and David Rubinger took his iconic photograph of three battle-weary Israeli soldiers standing in front of the Wall, nor even when the paratroopers' brigade commander, Mordechai (Motta) Gur, announced over the wireless: "Har Habayit beyadeinu" — "The Temple Mount is in our hands."

The story begins a few days later, on June 10 and 11, when Defense Minister Moshe Dayan commanded the demolition of the Palestinian neighborhood, the Mughrabi Quarter, which stood where the Kotel plaza stands today. More than 100 buildings, including three mosques, were destroyed, and hundreds of people lost their homes. The war was already over. Razing the neighborhood was not for military purposes, but, rather, to increase the size of the plaza so that thousands of Israelis could come to the Wall to pray during the upcoming Shavuot holiday. No plaque marks the Mughrabi Quarter site and no alternative housing was offered to the Palestinians who had lived there.

This is the beginning of the story of the modern Kotel, out of which grows the story of the women of Women of the Wall, who demand equal ritual access to it. The silences in that historic story prevent me from praying at the Wall and from supporting the women who want to wear tallit and tefillin when they pray there.

Since 1967, the Wall has become a symbol of Israeli nationalism. The discourse around the Wall reflects a discourse about antiquities in Israel, in which archaeology becomes another battlefield for both sides. The Wall is not only a site of sacred reflection; it has also become proof of national roots. In a recent survey, 43 percent of the Israeli public supported the rebuilding of the Third Temple.[1] This number includes 30 percent of secular Jews, whose likely reasons for wanting to rebuild the Temple are not religious. Rather, their reasons have to do with ownership and sovereignty; the leaders of the Temple Mount faithful movement use language that advocates widespread Jewish prayer on the Temple Mount and, ultimately, the rebuilding of the Temple itself.

Claiming that the Kotel is the most sacred site of the Jewish people, WoW has adopted the language of "liberating the Wall" from the ultra-Orthodox rabbinate while ignoring both the dispossession of the Palestinians from the Mughrabi neighborhood and the Palestinian connection to the sacred sites on the Temple Mount. In doing so, WoW has become an unwitting ally of some strange bedfellows — those in the movement to rebuild the Temple. WoW recently posted a piece (written by Rabbi Elli Fischer, an activist in the movement to reclaim the Temple Mount) on their website that advocated for equal access for everybody (Jews and Muslims) to pray on the Temple Mount and equal access for everybody (male and female Jews) to pray at the Kotel.

Claiming that the Kotel is the most sacred site of the Jewish people, WoW has adopted the language of "liberating the Wall" from the ultra-Orthodox rabbinate while ignoring the dispossession of the Palestinians. In doing so, WoW has become an unwitting ally of some strange bedfellows.

In some other world in which peace and justice reign, and nobody harbors any agendas aside from bettering the good of all, everybody would be able to pray together, or as they wished, at the Western Wall or on the Temple Mount itself. That, however, is not the world we live in. Nothing in Israel, or in the Middle East, is disconnected from anything else. Yet the issue of women's religious access to the Kotel is treated, especially in North America, as if it exists in a vacuum — separate from the dispossession of Palestinians in Sheikh Jarrah (just minutes from the Kotel), or the occupation more generally, or the final status of Israel and Palestine, or the future of a Judaism that concentrates on the supporting wall of a destroyed Temple, or the dreams of rebuilding a Temple and reinstituting sacrifices — rather than being something connected to the real lives and sufferings of Israelis and Palestinians

continued on next page

Rabbi **Aryeh Cohen**, a member of the *Sh'ma* Advisory Board, is Professor of Rabbinic Literature at the Ziegler School for Rabbinic Studies at American Jewish University. His latest book is *Justice in the City: An Argument from the Sources of Rabbinic Judaism.* He usually davens with Shtibl, an independent minyan he co-founded in Los Angeles; and he rouses rabble with T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights and CLUE-LA: Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice. He blogs at justice-in-the-city.com.

[1] haaretz.co.il/news/education/1.2069796

and real questions of peace and justice.

In this present situation, I cannot stand with or behind Women of the Wall. I am fearful of strengthening the nationalistic narratives that result from an unexamined attachment to the Wall, and of the damage to Judaism from the privileging of this place and this property above the concern for justice and peace. And I am not convinced that a victory in this fight would do anything substantial to lessen the grip of the ultra-Orthodox rabbinate over the religious life of the country.

Pushing Politicians for Social Change

STAV SHAFFIR

A few months ago, when Women of the Wall (WoW) held their Rosh Chodesh prayer service at the Kotel, I joined them. The experience was powerful, and it demonstrated just how much the struggle for the right to pray at the Wall is representative of a much larger issue: freedom of religion. Prayer at the Kotel isn't just about how who gets to pray wearing what. It raises larger issues about how we conduct religious conversions, how we marry, and how we are buried — that is, how we make religion a personal or communal practice rather than an isolating or estranging one.

As a member of the Knesset, I hope this government will create a "democracy" of sorts for Judaism, one with room for civil marriage, divorce, and gender and sexual identity differences, and one with a serious option for religious women to do military service.

Early in our statehood, politicians gave control over religious decisions and Judaism's holy sites to the ultra-Orthodox. Today, we need to take religion back from an oligarchy that fails to see how far it has pushed Jews away from Judaism.

Jewish life is everywhere in Israel. Our educational system, national holidays, language, and much else weave Judaism into the Zionist project and the State of Israel. But when all of Judaism's wide streams are sucked into a tiny stream, people are pushed away from all aspects of Judaism. Zionism, as a movement encompassing and incorporating Judaism as a religion, must continue to innovate and grow, and it must understand where Israeli Jews stand today — facing and embracing a modern world in which Judaism as a religion is a choice.

As a member of the 19th Knesset, I know that this is the time to redefine the relationship between religion and the State of Israel. President Obama said in his speech when he was here in Israel, "As a politician, I can assure you that political leaders will not take risks if the people do not push them to do so." I believe that statement to be true, and I believe Women of the Wall is pushing politicians in much the same way that we did in the summer 2011 tent-movement social protests. And, as a member of the Knesset for the Labor Party, I hear that voice.

As a member of Knesset, I hope this government will create a "democracy" of sorts for Judaism, one with room for civil marriage, divorce, and gender and sexual identity differences, and one with a serious option for religious women to do military service. Over the past months, I've met with the rabbi of the Kotel and the leadership of Women of the Wall in an effort to reach a compromise, perhaps along the lines of Natan Sharansky's plan. I hope to assist this process going forward, advocating for a freer, more just administration of the Kotel.

Born in Israel, the homeland of the Jewish people, I can't abide anyone deciding for me, or millions of Israelis like me, how Judaism should be manifest. No one should tell me that my Judaism is not "good enough." And, as a Jewish woman in Israel, I refuse to be pushed aside as a second-class citizen. No one branch of Judaism can determine how I live my life — as a Jew or as a woman. The morning I stood with the women of Women of the Wall, I felt accepted by a Judaism in which I could believe what was in my heart. It made me remember that religion, at its core, is about just that: the contents of the heart.

Stav Shaffir, the youngest member of the Knesset, represents the Labor Party. Shaffir was a founder and leader of the 2011 social protest movement. This essay was translated by Elisheva Goldberg.

Barring Women, Transforming Stones Into Idols

ELLEN WEINBERG DREYFUS

In 1974, as a first-year rabbinic student at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, I joined several of my classmates who were going to the Kotel for Simchat Torah. What an opportunity, I thought, to rejoice with the Torah in Judaism's most sacred place!

As we walked to the Kotel plaza, my classmates turned to the men's side and I to the side designated for women. They were immediately drawn into the dancing and singing. The Torah scrolls were passed from man to man, and the dancing was joyful and raucous. The women's side was quiet. Some women prayed silently, their hands touching the stones of the Wall. Others stood on chairs lined up against the *mechitzah,* to peer over the divider and watch the men dance. At some point, a few American girls, probably students, began to dance in a circle. I hesitated to join in, thinking that they were just dancing with each other; the *real* dancing that evening was with the Torah. I felt marginalized and excluded from the essential, meaningful activity associated with the festival.

That and other experiences — watching the *mechitzah* grow, the women's section shrink, and the restrictions increase — have made the Kotel feel to me more like a place of exclusion than one of sanctity. When I would go to Israel with congregational and rabbinic groups, tour guides would often suggest we visit the Kotel for *Kabbalat Shabbat*, "to watch the yeshiva boys come down for prayers." But that seemed akin to watching tribal rites in New Guinea or watching animals come to an oasis on safari.

Since then, I have experienced lovely services on the Kotel's southern steps, a particularly meaningful Tisha B'Av at Robinson's Arch, and various visits with tourists to offer private prayers and deliver notes into the crevices of the Wall. The only time I felt that I could pray at the Kotel was when I joined Women of the Wall, and even then we were bombarded by objects and epithets, and we had to read Torah in another location.

What some consider the most sacred place for Jewish worship has, in my opinion, been transformed into an idolatrous shrine. Instead of venerating a sacred site, a small segment of the Jewish people has fetishized it. This segment has more regard for the stones than for the people, especially if those people are not Orthodox men. The place itself has become the object of their worship, rather than a special location in which to worship God.

I am saddened to share this reflection. I recall the elation when the Israelis recaptured the Wall in 1967. In 1972, when I first visited, I was excited to take in the Wall's history and the stories contained in its stones — to think about the amazing legacy of tears and blood and triumph and song. I wanted to draw strength and tenacity from those stones. But instead, the stones have been spoiled; the ultra-Orthodox Jews who mean to protect them have transformed the stones into idols.

Women of the Wall has begun to restore the sanctity of the place for me, and I strongly support the right of all Jews to pray aloud and read Torah at the Kotel. But I still feel ambivalent. Exclusion frames any experience there and drowns out the sense of *kedusha* (holiness) for me. Given the choice when in Jerusalem, unless it is Rosh Chodesh, I pray elsewhere.

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Holy and Separate

I'm fascinated by two distinct translations — and associations — of the word *"kadosh."* In English, the word means "holy," and all its associations are religious. But in Hebrew, the word means both "holy" and "separate." So, the famous injunction, "*kedoshim tihiyu"* ("you shall be *kadosh"*), means not only "you shall be holy," but also "you shall be separate."

Contemporary liberal life, of course, is firmly *against* separation. We want everything to be mixed up together — people most of all. We don't like to separate Jews and non-Jews or women and men.

Recently, I've been thinking more about separation, especially in relation to food, where I mix things up less than I used to. My sense of the sanctity of food has grown in tandem with my willingness to eat simpler meals.

So my theory of *kedusha* (holiness) is evolving. I'm more open to the possibility that an aspect of holiness is rooted in some degree of separateness.

Nigel Savage, an Englishman in New York, is executive director of Hazon (Nigel@hazon.org).

STONE BY STONE: THE WESTERN WALL

The Western Wall's maximum height (from foundation stones to the top) is 131ft. **That's the equivalent of 10 elephants standing on top of each other.**

Over **1 MILLION** notes are placed into the cracks at the Kotel each year. They are removed **2X** a year and buried on **THE MOUNT OF OLIVES**

The earliest record of notes of prayer, or *kvitlach*, put into the crevices of the Wall date from the early 18th century. Jewish tradition holds that the divine presence rests upon the Western Wall.

The Western Wall Heritage Foundation, which governs the Wall, receives **$8.5 million** in Israeli government funds annually **& all 15 members** of the board are Orthodox men.

The exposed portion of the Western Wall (the Kotel) is 62 ft high. **The equivalent of just over 4 elephants.**

One of the largest stones is in the area of Robinson's Arch. **It weighs 520 tons, the equivalent of three 747s.**

FLORA AND FAUNA

Six distinct plants grow in the crevices of the Kotel. The most common is henbane, or *shikaron* in Hebrew, which means "drunkenness," as the plant is poisonous and intoxicating.

Small lizards, swallows, sparrows, and doves live at the Western Wall.

THE MOST VISITED SITES IN ISRAEL

1. **KOTEL**
   10,000,000 per year
2. **NAMAL PORT**
   4,300,000 per year
3. **YAD VASHEM**
   900,000 per year
4. **MASADA**
   724,000 per year

There was no permanent *mechitzah* prior to 1948, when the territory was controlled by the British. After the June 1967 War, Israel turned the space over to the Ministry of Religion. The plaza in front of the Kotel now has a *mechitzah* allotting 80% of the space to men.

Member of Knesset Aliza Lavie has introduced into the Knesset a law to have equal space for men & women.

WOMEN AND THE WALL

- **Dec 1988: A group of women praying at the Kotel is met with verbal abuse and threats from ultra-Orthodox worshippers, who view it as a violation of Jewish tradition. Women of the Wall is formed.**
- **December 1989: The Ministry of Religion institutes a regulation prohibiting any religious ceremony that does not conform to th status quo and offends the sensitivities of worshippers.**
- **2000-2003: Supreme Court decision affirms the right of wome to pray aloud, wearing *tallitot*, and to read from the Torah. After re-hearing at State's request, Court orders State to create prayer area at Robinson's Arch.**
- **Spring 2013: Court rules in favor of women's prayer at the Kotel with *tallitot*, *tefillin*, and reading Torah.**
- **Today: The rabbi administering the Kotel continues to instruct police to enforce an internal memorandum barring women from bringing a Torah into the Kotel plaza.**

Before the June 1967 War, the prayer area at the Western Wall was only a narrow alleyway (11.8 ft wide & 92 ft long) in the Muslim Mughrabi neighborhood.

After the June 1967 War, Israel razed the Muslim Mughrabi neighborhood and expanded the plaza in front of the Kotel to

26,000 SQUARE FEET

Another plant, the horsetail knotgrass, is cited in the Talmud as an antidote for snakebite.

Infographic by Here's My Chance (www.heresmychance.com)

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The Kotel: An Ancient Retaining Wall Became Holy

JOSHUA SCHWARTZ

Joshua Schwartz is a professor of the historical geography of ancient Israel and director of the Ingeborg Rennert Center for Jerusalem Studies in the Department of Land of Israel Studies and Archaeology at Bar-Ilan University in Ramat-Gan, Israel. He and his colleague Yehoshua Peleg are working on computer-generated virtual reconstructions of the Herodian Temple.

Around 19 BCE, as Herod (whose reign spanned from 37 to 4 BCE) was rebuilding the Jerusalem Temple, he doubled the size of the Temple Mount and created a large artificial platform. Around this platform he constructed four massive retaining walls. The Kotel (known as the Western Wall, the Wailing Wall, and the Wall of Tears) is the western retaining wall of Herod's Temple Mount platform. It never was part of the Temple and until the 16th century was not considered holy to Jews or anyone else. Today, it is considered among the most holy and important sites of Judaism and visited annually by millions — religious and secular Jews as well as many non-Jews. Sacred site or tourist site, it is probably the most famous retaining wall in (Jewish) history. Parts of the other Herodian retaining walls are still visible today. They have never been holy to the Jews.

The entire Western Wall is 1,601 feet long, not all of which is visible or accessible. The best-known section of the Kotel is at the prayer plaza, and it measures 187 feet in length. The present day plaza was constructed in the wake of the Six-Day War, after the razing of the Mughrabi Quarter — an Arab neighborhood that had extended to within 11.8 feet of the Kotel making prayer there extremely difficult. It is interesting to note that the Herodian expansion of the Temple Mount area and the construction of its retaining walls had also required the removal of nearby structures. The present day plaza allows for thousands of visitors daily.

Archeological excavations led by Benjamin Mazar with the assistance of Meir Ben-Dov uncovered the first 262 feet of the Kotel after the Six-Day War; those excavations can be viewed today in the archaeological park on the southern end of the Kotel. The remaining 1,050 feet continue underground beneath the streets and houses of the Old City of Jerusalem. These sections of the Wall were uncovered during ongoing excavations of the subterranean Temple Mount passageways by Dan Bahat and others. Another section of the Wall, approximately 95 feet, may be seen and visited in the Moslem Quarter, some 574 feet north of the prayer plaza. It is called the *Kotel haKatan* (The Small [Western] Wall). No religious importance was attached to this section of the Wall until the 1970s, when construction of a small plaza made it more accessible to visitors.

The construction of the Western Wall by Herod and his successors was no easy matter. Turonian and Cenomanian limestone had to be quarried and transported from ancient quarries in Jerusalem (one such quarry is found in the modern-day Russian Compound in the city center of Jerusalem, near Safra Square and somewhat far from the Temple Mount). The stonecutters used sophisticated techniques to loosen and split the stones. Smaller stones were transported by wagons and the massive stones were rolled on large wooden rollers.

The Herodian stones were mostly large blocks cut smooth, with narrow margins around the edges and smooth and slightly raised bosses in the center. Simple plain and smooth rectangular blocks were also used. The stones, stacked one on top of another with surfaces cut to a perfect match, were indented slightly inward in order to stabilize the Wall. No mortar, cement, or adhesive was used.

The stones of the Wall are not all the same size, with lengths ranging from 2.6 to 44.6 feet and heights from 3.6 to 4.3 feet; the thickness of stones averaged 15 feet. The cornerstones were larger: For example, the southwest corner of the Kotel has ashlars (rows of stones) measuring 39.3 feet long, 7.83 feet wide, and 3.5 feet high. These stones could weigh between 50 and 80 tons. They were placed in alternating header and stretcher positions, and because of their great size, they have withstood the tests of time and history.

In Herodian times, the Western Wall, according to Josephus (Antiquities 15:410), had four gates leading to and from the Temple Mount. These gates correspond to those discovered by 19th-century explorers, and they are named after them: Warren's Gate, Wilson's Arch, Barclay's Gate, and Robinson's Arch.

The Mishnah (Middot 1:3) mentions only one gate in the western retaining wall, the Kipponos Gate. Various attempts have been made to identify which of the gates mentioned by Josephus and uncovered by archaeologists this was, but none have been successful.

The upper courses of the Second Temple period wall were destroyed during the War of

Destruction (Menahem Av, August, 70 C.E.). The northern wall, the site of many battles, apparently suffered the most damage and might have been completely destroyed. The southern and eastern retaining walls suffered minimal damage at that time and changes in those walls were the results of developments centuries later.

Excavations of the Western Wall continue from time to time in an effort to uncover the entire Second Temple period history of the site, including that of pre-Herodian times before the Herodian expansion. Archaeologists focus, for example, on the market and adjacent roads and streets along the Western Wall, even examining the drainage system under some of the streets. There is also ongoing study of the architecture of Herodian walls in order to fine tune dating. And, of course, they continue to uncover and study remains of other periods of history relevant to the retaining wall and nearby structures. Much still remains to be uncovered.

Jews, Muslims, and the Wall

HILLEL COHEN

Until the 15th century, the Kotel was almost unknown, certainly unvisited among most Jews. Jewish pilgrims to Jerusalem, and the Jewish residents of the city, expressed their longing for the sacred place, the Temple Mount, from a distance. They climbed the Mount of Olives, to the east of the city, looked toward the Temple Mount, and prayed for the rebuilding of the Temple. It was probably during the later part of the Mamluk rule (1291-1516) that the Jewish Quarter was established in its current place, and the Kotel became an important site of worship. In this process, the sanctity of the place for Jews intensified; the midrash that originally referred to the *Shekhinah* hovering over the western wall of the Temple itself was reinterpreted as "the *Shekhinah* never left the Western Wall of the Temple Mount compound." (*Yalkut Shimoni, Melakhim* 195) Soon thereafter began the struggle for the rights of Jews to pray there.

This very space was sacred to Muslims as well. According to Muslim tradition, the prophet Muhammad ascended to heaven from the Temple Mount, and the area to the west of it was dedicated as a Muslim pious endowment by Nur al-Din, the son of Saladin in the 13th century. It was used as place of meditation for Muslim saints from the Maghreb (North Africa),as well as a residence for Mughrabis who decided to settle in the holy city.

Since the Ottoman Period, beginning in 1517, the Kotel has been a barometer of Jewish-Muslim relations in the city. When the parties were on good terms, the Jews enjoyed freedom of access and worship. When the Muslims suspected that the Jews intended to take over the area, they restricted their movement. For Muslims, Jewish attempts to make the Kotel "theirs," smelled of ingratitude: Under Christian rule, Jews had not been allowed to live in the city. In fact, Muslim leaders, such as Omar Ibn al-Khattab who defeated the Byzantines in the 7th century and Saladin, who reconquered the city from the Crusaders in the 12th century, were the ones to allow the re-establishment of Jewish community in Jerusalem. And they expected the Jews to be grateful. The Muslim approach was also based on the concept of *dhimitude*: Jews and Christians were allowed to live in peace and security in the Islamic empire as long as they did not challenge the legitimacy of the state and accepted the hierarchical political order according to which Islam was superior to other religions.

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In the first three centuries of the Ottoman rule in the country, this hierarchy was maintained and the tension near the Kotel was easily contained. But the decline of the Ottoman Empire and the ascension of Western powers in Jerusalem in the 19th century shook the delicate interreligious status quo in the city. Two European Jews, Sir Moses Montefiore (1784-1885) and Baron Edmund de-Rothschild (1845-1934) personify the dramatic change. Both were close to European decision-making circles. Both (separately) were active in supporting Jewish communities in late-Ottoman Palestine. Both tried to purchase the Kotel from the Mughrabi community, offering significant sums of money. Both failed. However, their activities increased the awareness among the Arabs that the Jews, together with the European superpowers, were keen to take over the holy places in Jerusalem if not the Holy Land as a whole.

Sure enough, Muslims and Jews interpret those Jewish efforts to purchase the Kotel in totally different ways. For Jews, the attempt was based on a desire to make access for prayer at the holy site easier; they claimed they would not harm anyone. For Muslims, the effort symbolized the degradation of their status: from a ruling class to a community living under constant foreign (European and Jewish) manipulation. They experienced it as a Zionist attempt to uproot them from their ancient homeland. Moreover, they understood the effort as proof that the greater Zionist goal was to rebuild the Temple on the site of al-Aqsa Mosque. Thus, they responded with increased efforts to maintain their own presence at the site and to put obstacles before the Jewish worshippers.

It was, therefore, no surprise that the struggle over the Kotel led to mass demonstrations in 1929 by Jews in Jerusalem, to mutual acts of lynching in the city, and to violent Muslim outbursts throughout the country in August of that year. Four decades later, after the Israeli forces entered the Old City of Jerusalem during the 1967 War, before the battles even ended, Israeli officers evacuated the 650 residents of the Mughrabi Quarter (the area in front of the Kotel) and totally demolished it.

Arabs viewed this as a step toward taking over the Haram al-Sharif, the Temple Mount with its sacred mosques. From a Jewish perspective, the destruction of the Mughrabi Quarter and the build up of the plaza in front of the Kotel can be interpreted as a conscious effort to privilege the Wall over the Temple Mount. It, along with Moshe Dayan's decision to remove the Israeli flag from the Dome of the Rock and to prohibit Jews from praying on the Mount, would also channel and contain Jewish messianic emotions. However, a growing number of Jews and Jewish movements (such as the Temple Institute of Rabbi Yisrael Ariel and the Temple Mount and Land of Israel Faithful Movement of Gershon Salomon) argue that the Kotel is only a substitute for the holy mountain and Holy Temple. They believe that the Kotel should return to its original function — a wall that supports the ramp upon which the Third Temple will be built.

Early Zionists: A Low-Key Approach to the Kotel

MOTTI GOLANI

Motti Golani is a professor at Tel Aviv University studying the history of the British Mandate and the State of Israel. He is a former Senior Member at St. Antony's College in Oxford, U.K. Golani is the author of many books on Israel and the Mandate period, including *Zion in Zionism: The Zionist Policy and the Question of Jerusalem, 1937-1949; Palestine Between Politics and Terror, 1945-1947;* and *Wars Don't Just Happen, Israeli Memory, Power and Free Will.*

"Every Jew dreamed of it for 2,000 years, but no one thought it would happen so fast." — Jerusalem Mayor Teddy Kollek, June 7, 1967

In May 1967, on the eve of the Six-Day War, a reporter asked David Ben-Gurion whether he felt a yearning for the Western Wall. "I feel no yearning," Israel's founding father replied. "Why not?" the reporter asked him, taken aback. "Because it is not in our hands." Ben-Gurion's response is not surprising to anyone familiar with how the formative Zionist leaders — from Theodor Herzl to Ben-Gurion — approached the holy places in Jerusalem.

The leading early Zionists — including Herzl, Chaim Weizmann, and Ben-Gurion, in addition to the religious-Zionist movement — differentiated clearly between the "heavenly Jerusalem" and its earthly counterpart. The Jewish national movement was named for Jerusalem, known biblically as Zion, and that symbolism, spiritually and politically, mobilized the country. That early leadership adopted a halakhic approach stating that the return of the holy places would happen only at the end of days. Insistence on those sites, it was understood, could be seen as an obstacle that would prevent Zionism from realizing its goal: the establishment of a state for the Jews. Even when ardent young Jews fell into the trap set for

them by the Mufti of Jerusalem in 1929, as he sought to turn the Western Wall into an arena of national struggle, the Zionist leadership did not follow suit. The leaders of the *yishuv* (the pre-state organized Jewish community in Palestine) stopped attempts by the secular Zionist Betar (revisionist youth movement) and the Hapoel (labor sport movement) to establish (or protect) a *mechitzah* (partition) near the Wall. In 1937, the Jewish Agency executive (with the authority to negotiate with the Mandate government) informed the British government that, in the event of the partition of Palestine, the Jews would forgo the holy places in Jerusalem. Jerusalem would be divided and the western part of the city, where no holy places exist, would become the capital of the Jewish state. The eastern section, with Jewish, Muslim, and Christian holy places — including the Western Wall — would remain a British Protectorate.

Ben-Gurion believed that it was impossible to mobilize the Jewish people in favor of a Jewish state without "Jerusalem." Yet, some Jewish people unfamiliar with Jerusalem's map in details, did not distinguish between the Rehavia neighborhood in the western section and the Old City (where the Wall is located) in the eastern section. Accordingly, in 1949, Israel secretly reached an agreement with Jordan, contrary to the approach of the United Nations, to divide the city based on the principles of 1937. This state of affairs, which enjoyed a tacit British backing, made it possible for Israel to declare western Jerusalem its capital in December 1949. The principle that had functioned tacitly for 50 years became a concrete reality.

To all appearances, the government of Israel did not ignore the Jewish attachment to the Wall. The April 1949 armistice agreement with Jordan stipulated that the Palestinians who had abandoned their homes on the seam between the western and eastern parts of the city would be allowed to return. Concurrently, Jews who wished to pray at the Wall would be allowed to do so. And yet both sides found it convenient not to fulfill these clauses. Israel did not want the Palestinians too close to the border between West and East Jerusalem, and was therefore willing to give up on the "Wall deal." The Israeli state system set out to translate the situation into a tenable reality. The Ministry of Religious Affairs industriously empowered, and even invented, holy places in the Israeli part of the city, such as King David's Tomb and the President's Room on Mount Zion, the office of President Yitzchak Ben Zvi. And Israelis who visited Jerusalem could catch a glimpse of the Wall from Mount Zion or from the Notre Dame hostel.

In 1956, on the eve of the Sinai War, Israel wanted to take advantage of its collaboration with Britain and France against Egypt to launch an eastward offensive; Israel wanted to get to the Israeli enclave on Mount Scopus and perhaps reach the Jordan River. Nothing was said about the Wall; that was not a coincidence.

In the 1950s and 1960s, Israel faced serious national problems, such as immigration, the economy, and security. Those issues, along with a secular national ethos of national maximalism and territorial minimalism (a real, independent Jewish state in a part of *Eretz Yisrael*), left the holy places an abstract issue that lay beyond the state's urgent attention. The National Religious Party (NRP), founded in 1955, was the standard bearer of the separation between religious considerations and issues relating to state policy and the military. On the eve of the Israeli army's entry into the Old City, on June 7, 1967, Interior Minister Haim Moshe Shapira, from the NRP, stated in the cabinet that going into the Old City of Jerusalem was one thing, but getting out might be a different matter.

Israel won that war with a crushing victory.

continued on next page

The Wall should be a free site for any Jewish religious rituals. And Israeli society should return to its pre-1967 plan of hosting national ceremonies in the western part of Jerusalem on Mount Herzl.

Grief, Un-walled

I was nineteen weeks pregnant when one of the twin boys I was carrying was diagnosed with a rare spinal defect that would have assured him a life of paralysis and pain. Bereft, my husband and I made the agonizing decision to stop his heart in utero. I delivered the twins — one healthy, one lifeless — together. It was the heart-wrenching intersection of medicine, choice, morality, and hope.

We struggled to decide how to handle the delivery. Should we treat the stillborn fetus like a mass of tissue, or like the child we mourned?

Our souls yearned to make holy this unholy experience, and so we gave our son a burial and, at his graveside, blessed him with a name — Ori, "my light." In a fit of movement and sorrow, my husband heaved dirt onto Ori's tiny pine box until it was gone from view. Bleary-eyed, we held hands and said goodbye.

Becky Rolnick, who holds a master's degree in fine arts in film production from the University of Southern California, is currently producing an independent documentary.

Immediately, leaders of the government and army visited the Wall; the visit was suffused with the joy of victory but devoid of religious ritual until Chief Rabbi Shlomo Goren of the Israel Defense Forces arrived and brought a messianic fervor to this national event.

In this fraught period, no one noticed that the defense minister, Moshe Dayan, had ordered the IDF to leave the Temple Mount (and created a policy of not having Israeli soldiers police the area that remains in effect to this day). And few noticed when the IDF ordered the demolition of the Palestinian Mughrabi neighborhood that abutted the Wall, instantly creating the well-known plaza to the west of the Wall. Erased with the Mughrabi neighborhood were 70 years of Zionist and Israeli policies that had kept dealings with the Western Wall low profile. The Israeli public accepted the approach that the Mufti had sought 40 years earlier — to acknowledge both the national and religious character of the Temple Mount and the Western Wall.

Today, IDF recruits take their oath of allegiance at the Western Wall, and it is the site of the keynote memorial ceremony for Israelis who have fallen in the line of duty. And, with the rise of religious nationalism since the 1970s, there have been increasing calls to confer religious validity on the takeover of the Temple Mount and the Western Wall. The proponents of this approach wish to exclude from the site not only Muslims but also Jews — men and women — who in their view are neither religious nor nationalistic enough.

The desire to preserve a symbolic connection with this holy place has become a fraught cause whose more fundamental advocates endanger Israel's existence — no less. The Wall should be a free site for any Jewish religious rituals. And Israeli society should return to its pre-1967 plan of hosting national ceremonies in the western part of Jerusalem on Mount Herzl. It is essential to remember the symbolic differentiation between the "heavenly Jerusalem" and its earthly — now Zionist — counterpart. We should go back and heed what Herzl, Weizmann, and Ben-Gurion had to say about this issue.

In a Few Hours, Losing Everything

BEN LYNFIELD

The annual Jerusalem Day celebration, which Israel's chief rabbinate has declared a religious holiday, is a celebration of "the reunification of Jerusalem, the nullification of the border." According to Jerusalem Deputy Mayor David Hadari, "It was previously impossible to reach the Western Wall, but it was liberated and the Temple Mount is in our hands."

In his comments, Hadari recalled the divided city that existed before the June 1967 Six-Day War, when Israel took control of the city's eastern sector, ruled until then by Jordan and populated exclusively by Arabs. Today, Hadari noted, Jewish neighborhoods are expanding all over this sector.

But not everyone thinks there is cause to rejoice. The Palestinians, who make up 39 percent of Jerusalem's population, remember sadly the demolished Mughrabi Quarter — what is today the long, wide plaza in front of the Western Wall — where between 600 and 1,500 people lived prior to June 10, 1967.

The quarter's destruction is an event either unknown or repressed by most Israelis and Jews who visit the Kotel. It is deleted from public discourse about the Old City. But for some Palestinians, it is still a sore wound.

The home of Mohammed Ibrahim Mawalid, now 85, was in the quarter, along with 135 other buildings, including three mosques and two *zawiyas*, or pilgrim hospices. Palestinian historians say that some of the Mughrabi Quarter buildings were more than 700 years old, dating back to the time of Saladin's son, Al-Afdal.

Israeli bulldozers erased them on June 10 and 11 on the orders of Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Dayan, to enable large numbers of worshippers to come to the Western Wall for Shavuot prayers the following week. Now, not even a plaque marks the site. It is as if the Mughrabi Quarter never existed.

In 1967, Mawalid held the post of *mutawalli*, the Jordanian government official responsible for the Islamic properties in the quarter. This provided modest earnings. He also supervised a cafeteria at the offices of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. He moved to the Mughrabi Quarter in 1949 after fleeing the village of Bir Ma'in (on the site of what is now the Israeli town of Modi'in) during the Arab-Israeli war a year earlier. He says he had to leave the village because of Israeli artillery bombardments.

In the Mughrabi Quarter, Mawalid's

Ben Lynfield, who has a master's degree in Middle East studies from Harvard University, writes from the Middle East for British and American publications. This article is adapted from a piece that originally appeared in the *Forward* this past May 31.

seven-room house, about 100 meters from the Western Wall, was home to 15 people, including his mother, brothers, wife and children. The house was white stone and about 250 years old, he said. After the demolition, the refugees dispersed to other locales in the Jerusalem area and to Jordan and Morocco.

On the night of June 10, 1967 — just as Israel was consolidating its seemingly miraculous victory over Egypt, Jordan, Syria, and other Arab armies — Israeli bulldozers began demolishing the Palestinian houses closest to the Western Wall. "We thought they were going to make a road, to broaden a road to the Western Wall," Mawalid said. He did not at first imagine that his entire neighborhood would be razed.

One person, Rasmiya Abu Aghayl, a woman in her 50s, was killed when a bulldozer demolished her house while she was still in it.

Lt. Col. Ya'akov Salman, the deputy military governor who commanded the demolition, told the Israeli daily newspaper *Haaretz* that Palestinian residents initially refused to depart. Salman ordered an officer to begin the demolitions nevertheless. "The order to evacuate the neighborhood was one of the hardest in my life," he said, according to the book *The Accidental Empire: Israel and the Birth of the Settlements, 1967-1977*, by Israeli journalist Gershom Gorenberg. "When you order, 'Fire!' [in battle], you're an automaton. Here you had to give an order knowing you are likely to hurt innocent people."

Amir Cheshin, who served as adviser on East Jerusalem to Mayor Teddy Kollek during the 1980s, believes that the decision to demolish the quarter was correct: "In retrospect, it was a smart act. Otherwise, the Kotel would have remained a miserable alley. If they didn't do it [in the war's immediate aftermath], they wouldn't have been able to do it later."

Nazmi Jubeh, a historian at Birzeit University in the West Bank, considers the demolition "an absolute act of violence against people and their houses and habitat. These are people who in a few hours lost everything. We lost an eight-centuries-long tradition of North Africans and Andalusians in Jerusalem that was an important element of historic Jerusalem."

A Story of a City: The *'Burak'*

MAHDI KLEIBO

Muslims and Jews dispute the ownership of the *Burak* (known to the Jews as the Wailing Wall). The *Burak* is sacred to Muslims because it is the site where our Prophet Muhammad ascended to heaven. It is named "*Burak*" for the winged horse that the prophet rode from Mecca to Al Aqsa Mosque. The horse was tied to the Wall when Muhammad ascended to heaven.

The dispute over this Wall is increasing. Below, I share observations about the archeology and history of the Wall, which I hope will make clear the parameters of this conflict.

The *Burak* is approximately 180 feet long and 65 feet high, and it contains seven layers of underground stones; these stones are considered the most ancient stones in the area. One third of the Wall is buried beneath the soil. The pavement in front of the Wall rises about 2,322 feet above sea level, which is the lowest part of the Old City.

The area facing the site was excavated to reveal its hidden parts. These excavations showed that the old wall consisted of seven stone layers from the time of Emperor Herod (37-4 BCE); four other layers are from the 2nd century, and the stones on the upper part of the Wall date back to the Byzantine era, the Umayyad (8th century), and the Mamluk periods (13th century).

During the Mamluk Period (1291-1516), Muslims took care of the Wall. Although Jews claimed that the Wall and its environs were part of King Solomon's Temple, Muslims considered it to be a part of the Al Aqsa Mosque, the third holiest site for Muslims. It has remained under Muslim control (under the jurisdiction of the Waqf) even during the time of the Ottoman invasion (1516-1918) of the land, when the Turks allowed Jews to pray near the Wall as a gesture of tolerance.

In 1929, following a long-running dispute between Muslims and Jews over access to and modifications near the Western Wall (setting up chairs and a screen, or a barrier for prayer, which violated an Ottoman ruling), violence erupted. The Burak Uprising began after the Jewish holiday of Tisha B'Av (August 15, 1929), when several hundred right-wing Jews, many members of the Betar youth organization, marched to the Wall, raised the flag, and sang "Hatikva," the national Jewish anthem.

continued on next page

Mahdi Kleibo, a Palestinian born in 1972, lives in East Jerusalem. For the past eight years, he has been working with Palestinian nonprofits to develop socioeconomic productivity. He is also the representative for the Swiss Education Group with the External Academic Relations Office of Bethlehem University.

The next day, a demonstration organized by the Supreme Muslim Council marched to the Wall. Over the course of the next several days, after inflammatory leaflets and sermons had been disseminated, much violence ensued, including twelve attacks by Jews on Arabs and seven attacks by Arabs on Jews (according to a Jerusalem police report).

After the occupation of Jerusalem in 1967, the Israeli army destroyed and demolished the Ottoman and Muslim buildings near the site and in the Moroccan area (known as the Mugrabi Quarter) in order to build what became the plaza in front of the Wall.

Israelis have also excavated the area facing the Al Aqsa Mosque and destroyed the historic underside of the path near the mosque. They created what is called the "Hashmonaim Tunnel," which starts from the southern side of the *Burak* and reaches the Ghawanmah Door in the North. There is another tunnel that reaches Silwan to the south of Al Aqsa, and some believe that this tunnel runs beneath the mosque itself.

The Israelis are now considering demolishing a hilly area near the Moroccan Door in order to enlarge and widen the southern part of the Wall and build a new bridge in the *Burak* square that leads to the door through which thousands of pilgrims enter. Some observers fear that this plan includes a rebuilding of the Jewish Temple in that area adjacent to Al Aqsa Mosque.

According to the Christian gospel, Jesus Christ used to go to the Temple to teach his disciples, which angered the Jewish leaders at that time. The Muslims also believe that the prophet Muhammad used to pray facing the Al Aqsa Mosque while still in Mecca. This would mean that the Wall of the *Burak* existed even before Allah (God) took the Prophet Mohammad from Mecca to Jerusalem and then to heaven around the year 620 C.E.

Jerusalem is considered the closest city to heaven according to the three monotheistic religions, Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. The *Burak* is considered an Islamic holy site. Jews also consider the Wall a Jewish sacred place. As Muslims, we know we will never be able to gain the sympathy of the world to our cause if we deny the existence of Israeli holy places and historical facts. We hope the world will consider Jerusalem as a place to reconcile the millions of believers. Emotion is of course extreme in such a place where religious holy sites and people intermingle. It is for this reason that we must reach a peaceful agreement that depends on peaceful coexistence and mutual recognition of one another.

Holiness Is…

As a musician and educator, I encounter a question every day: "What is holiness?" I put the question to a group of teen campers at Shwayder Camp in Idaho Springs, Colo. to see if I could gain some insight from them. Their responses follow:

Holiness is…

- when I need to talk to God
- listening to silence
- believing in the sun when the sun is not in the sky, believing in God when God is not with you
- "What? I'm so confused"
- the strength in my hands, the tip of my pen, the doctors who help to heal
- an ambiguous term; not something I can explain
- the boundaries that keep us in line
- a tree sprouting from the ground
- not hard to feel when we take time to really see or listen
- something I don't think about
- being present
- practicing the same thing until you think you know what it is
- keeping kosher; none of my friends know what it means but that does not stop me
- a person who picks up trash when no one's watching or takes extra time to check in with a stranger who seems to be having a hard time
- the wrong word: everything's supposed to be holy, but what if holy means commonplace and we just don't know it yet?
- a community in which people support each other and depend on each other
- my room, the place where I shut myself out of the world, do whatever I please, and allow myself to concentrate on my life
- sometimes passed down from generations
- what starts life and lets us keep going; writing my own story

Naomi Less, a worship and rock musician and an experiential Jewish educator, founded Jewish Chicks Rock. She is a founding company member of Storahtelling. She can be reached at naomiless.com.

Meeting the Crown Jewel of Jewish History

SARA HIRSCHHORN

They tell me this is the Wall," wrote Jewish activist and writer Elie Wiesel in the pages of a special issue of *Hadassah Magazine* in July 1967 on his first visit to the Kotel after the Six-Day War. He went on, "I don't believe it… I am afraid to believe it. Deep down, of course, I realize they are right, that indeed it is the very Wall — which Jew cannot recognize it instantly! Yet, I cannot believe that it is I, I, who now stands before it, gazing as if in a dream…." Beholding this architectural monument to Jewish continuity for the first time, he seems to speak of the miracle of 1967 within a broader span of Jewish history, a place and space where "the enemy…was defeated by the totality of Jewish history itself! Two thousand years of suffering, longing, and hope were mobilizing for the battle." He and others helped inspire American Jewry's appreciation of the "1967 moment," which allowed American Jews to reimagine both Israel and themselves and cemented a connection between the Diaspora Jewish community and the State of Israel.

Prior to 1967, most American Jews had a supportive, if tenuous, connection to the State of Israel, and few had actually visited the fledgling country. The Western Wall itself — under Jordanian sovereignty for the two decades after the 1948 War of Independence — was both physically and emotionally inaccessible. (The lack of physical accessibility to the Wall contributed to its becoming an idealized monument rather than a place with a visceral emotional connection to Israelis and other Jews.) Moreover, the Kotel was primarily considered a site of devotional life for pilgrims rather than a symbol of national liberation and unity. In contrast, the Six-Day War was a gripping cosmic drama that played out over television and radio, and from synagogue pulpits across the United States. The drama captured Jewish-American attention as never before, especially the conquest of Jerusalem, with the cry of charismatic army commander Mordechai (Motta) Gur, *"Har Habayit beyadeinu!"* "The Temple Mount is in our hands!" The ensuing sound of the shofar being blown and the sight of soldiers weeping at the Western Wall resonated with Jews around the world.

For the surge of tourists, volunteers, and students who came to the state after that war, the Kotel became a focal point of activity. Publishing a reflection on her experiences in Israel in the fall issue of *Midstream* magazine, Chana Faerstein, an American-Israeli English professor at the Hebrew University, shared the thrilling moment of the capture of the Old City: "Jerusalem is ours! ...We listened suddenly wide awake, to the thrilling account of the conquering army…People stream into the streets…hugging, kissing, crying mazal tov!"

Journalist Ruth Gruber Michaels recounted praying at the Kotel several weeks later, on the night of Tisha B'Av: "We joined tens of thousands at the Western Wall. The people, winding their way up the hills, their faces lit by the moon, were like people in a medieval painting. There was no sadness this Tisha B'Av. Now was the time for rejoicing. …At last we reached the Wall…I stood with the women and prayed...prayed for my children, for Phil [her husband], for Jerusalem…prayed that there would be no more war." (*Hadassah Magazine*)

continued on next page

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A tourism supplement from 1967 suggested that the Western Wall represented Jewish history finally brought to life, a "living Bible" for all to visit.

For theologian Abraham Joshua Heschel, who reported on his enraptured visit to the Western Wall that fall (again in *Hadassah Magazine*), the Wall was not only an existing monument to Jewish unity and jubilation but also a harbinger of messianic deliverance: "At first I fainted. Then I saw: a wall of frozen tears, a cloud of sighs… The Wall. Stubborn, loving, waiting for redemption. The ground on which I stand is Amen. My words become echoes. All of our history is waiting here… What is the Wall? The unceasing marvel. Expectation. The Wall will not perish. The redeemer will come."[1] From these various points of view, the Western Wall emerged as a symbol of both the Jewish past and future for the American Jewish community.

Arabs were absent in the accounts of Jewish-Americans visiting the Wall in the months just after the war, and few people seemed to imagine how Palestinians and others would react after Israel annexed East Jerusalem (and the Old City). The narrative told a story of "reluctant conquerors" (Michaels' column title) over "vanquished Arabs" (a column by the editor on Abba Eban's perceived heroic diplomacy over Arab recalcitrance at the United Nations). Some writings, such as Molly Lyons Bar-David's column, "Diary of an Israeli Housewife," expressed a patronizing naiveté: "It's hard to know now what most Arabs think about us or their future. But most of them, I hope, realize that we want what's good for them." Attitudes toward Palestinians and others who had claims to the area surrounding the site soon hardened.

The Western Wall was seen as the "crown jewel" of religious-nationalist pilgrimage sites and a tourism and settlement gateway to many — especially those with newfound interest in the occupied territories. For them, the Western Wall was a Jewish-Israeli monument. Since the 1960s, Jewish-American travel to Israel has become more routinized for both individuals and the institutions of American Jewry (such as federations), and the Kotel has become a mandatory stop on any visit to the state — with photographs to document the experience. Today, the Kotel hosts a diverse population of other pilgrims from the United States, from Christian Zionists to Hollywood celebrities. Most recently, the Western Wall has also been a site of Jewish-American advocacy, including the active participation of American Jews across the denominational (and political) spectrum with the group Women of the Wall.

History suggests that while cracks have often appeared in the Diapora-Israeli relationship over the past 40 years, the Western Wall will continue to play a pivotal role in building the bond that exists today.

[1] This passage was later collected in *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity: Abraham Joshua Heschel*, Susannah Heschel, editor (Farrar, Strauss and Giroux), pages 283-284.

Holiness in the Dirt

It is a truism that "holiness" means separateness and differentiation. "You shall be holy: you shall be separated." (Sifra, Kedoshim, 1) It is but a short distance from here to the understanding that a person who separates himself or herself from the community is holy. Several places in rabbinic literature oppose this stance, including: "A person should always evaluate himself as if holiness is resting in his stomach." (Rabbi Elazar, Bavli Ta'anit 11a-11b)

The Talmud understands Rabbi Elazar's words in a very concrete way — not as a symbol. He calls "holy" the functions of the stomach — an organ that does not allow for separation, that digests food and sends it to be expelled into the world. This is in contrast to the view that places of holiness should be distanced from life; for example, one should not pray in a place abutting a toilet.

The claim that the Temple is not found in Jerusalem but in the heart is not enough for this sage. Rather, he sees holiness not in "clean" organs but in the "dirty" organ: the stomach. Holiness lives in the place where there is life — in the place where there is movement and processes, and therefore in the place where there is dirt. Rabbi Elazar wants us to search for holiness only in our real lives.

Ruhama Weiss, a teacher of Talmud at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Jerusalem, is director of its Blaustein Center for Pastoral Counseling. Translated by Aryeh Cohen.

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Ethics *continued from page 24*

Initially, Jeremy and I wondered how we would explain to our daughter why we thought this was a bad idea, but then we worried that we would give her the message that her teachers had bad judgment. And while we thought about speaking directly with the teacher, we decided against it, noting that fourteen children had already, diligently, brought in their washcloths. Considering this dilemma three years later, I wince at the layers of privilege that make possible this type of handwringing.

In the end, I bought the washcloths (made in Bangladesh!) and gave them to my daughter to bring to school, to be shipped to Haiti, where they likely helped no one, except my daughter's sense of her own utility. And we, her parents, let her believe, falsely, that she had helped someone. I know that my children will soon be old enough to understand the complexities of doing right in the world and, in turn, how paltry our efforts are in the face of need that is so tremendous. In the meantime, these falsehoods only continue. About the homeless man, Jim, that we pass every morning on the way to school, my son asked, "Why can't we get everyone we know to put a dollar in his basket and then he can buy himself a house?" Rather than explaining the many reasons why this would be insufficient to house Jim, I said weakly, "What a beautiful idea, whom do you think we should ask first?" and walked down Broadway feeling numb. We are in a holding pattern — borne out of the privilege of resources, both monetary and psychological — that sometimes feels like a big lie.

Discussion Guide

1. What endows a site, whether a wall or a ruin, with holiness? And when does it become dangerous to endow a physical space, perhaps especially a contested one, with spiritual qualities? Is the Wall the closest Jews have to, say, the Vatican, or the Mormon Temple? Are such comparisons uncomfortable, relevant, or beside the point?
2. What does holiness mean for you? Do places inspire such feelings? Have you experienced the Wall as a place of holiness and, if so, why?
3. How does using the Kotel for rituals such as "military swearing-in ceremonies" complicate the fragile relationship between the sacred and the profane? Does it endow military activities with the aura of "holy war"?
4. Can you envision Jerusalem as the shared capital of two states — Israel and Palestine?
5. Should women be permitted to pray at the Kotel with *tallitot* and a Torah? What complicates this discussion?

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Ethics
Sigi Ziering

This year, our Sigi Ziering column focuses on the ethics of parenting. Each month, an esteemed guest columnist will wrestle with what Jewish texts and our interpretive tradition teach us about the multidimensional understandings of family and the ethical questions that are raised as parents take on parenting with serious reflection. This column is sponsored by Bruce Whizin and Marilyn Ziering in honor of Marilyn's husband, Sigi Ziering, of blessed memory. Visit shma.com to view the series and responses.

The Complexities of Doing Good

JOANNA SAMUELS

Becoming a parent has been the most life-changing and blessing-filled experience of my life. It has also forced me to confront the ethical challenges of our many privileges as a family. First are the stark facts of our lives. On the day my daughter was born, December 23, 2005, and again on the day when my son was born, 2½ years later, about 350,000 other children were born across our planet. Of these children, the vast majority will live without adequate food or regular education, and without access to medical care, electricity, and safe housing. By world standards, in terms of income, housing, access to food, education, and medical care, my children are in the top 1,000 of all children born around the world on their respective birthdays. Most children of *Sh'ma* readers are also in the top 1,000. Occupy Wall Street aside, our children are the 1 percent.

This privilege is invisible to my children — which is entirely developmentally appropriate. Therein lies the ethical dilemma. My children live in a bubble — a bubble created by their privilege, to be sure, but a bubble also created, nurtured, and protected by everything I aspire to about child development: sharing difficult news in an age-appropriate way, helping them to feel that they are part of the solution, helping them to engage their conscience in a deep way, and supporting their attempts to right the problems that they observe around them.

The ethical quandaries are made more manifest by efforts to "do good" in the world. Three years ago, when Haiti was nearly destroyed by an earthquake, my daughter was 4 years old. My husband, Jeremy, and I explained to her that there was a bad storm in Haiti, and that we were sending *tzedakah* to some organizations there that were helping people. The next day, she came home from preschool with a list of items (washcloths, soap, toothbrushes) to buy and bring to school for children in Haiti. Already, newspaper reports were describing the ways in which sending goods to Haiti was creating short-term problems (there was no operating port that could manage the influx of clothing and household items, and a bottleneck at the port could slow down the distribution of food and medical supplies); as well, an influx of these items could create long-term problems by dis-incentivizing the production and manufacturing of goods within Haiti. In other words, my daughter's school was suggesting an effort useless in the short-term and harmful in the long term — but carefully and lovingly designed so that my child could feel useful in the face of such a terrible tragedy.

At first, we ignored the washcloth request. How could we explain to her that this was ridiculous? We kept rolling our eyes at the light blue piece of paper hanging on our refrigerator, alternately smug that we would never fall for such a mistaken idea of international aid — and angry that the privilege afforded to children such as ours is so extreme that they even need to be made to feel helpful in a tragedy in which there is virtually no way for them to actually help. Of course, our daughter just kept asking us when we were going to buy the washcloths, as the pile at school was getting bigger and soon they would sail on a big ship to Haiti to help the children there.

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