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## Following the dream of a Third Temple in Jerusalem

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"Thanks to you I had a tremendous insight," Yehuda Glick roared at me as I entered the room where a meeting of the joint directorate of the Temple movements was taking place. "I went up to the Mount of Olives today," he continued, "and I looked toward the Temple Mount. And what do I see? Two round domes, next to each other! And then it came to me: Those who want to build the Temple want to suckle from the source! Those who are willing to forgo the Temple make do with milk substitutes." Glick was referring to an article I published a few months ago about the right of women to choose not to breast-feed.

I wasn't surprised that the media-savvy Glick, the spokesman of the joint directorates, had done his homework about me; but I have to say that his metaphor left me feeling uncomfortable. The meeting took place in an ultra-Orthodox Jerusalem neighborhood, in a religious study institution whose name I was asked not to divulge. A huge poster with a photograph of the slain ultranationalist Meir Kahane greeted me at the entrance.

The invitation to the meeting had arrived, at the last minute, by surprise, following a lively day-long correspondence between representatives of the movements that were taking part in the event. The discussion revolved around the question of whether a journalist from Haaretz could be trusted and allowed to attend. The majority, Glick among them, argued that there was nothing to hide and that every piece of publicity was worth it, even if they had to let an unabashed enemy such as Haaretz in.

But one of the female guides, who takes brides and other women on visits to the Temple Mount ? and who had told me a few days earlier that she was becoming religiously observant and actually had relatives who subscribed to Haaretz ? was outraged by the idea of my

attendance. "Practical talk about promoting the Temple Mount projects and even building a Temple and performing sacrifices is material that is impossibly grating to Haaretz ears," she wrote her friends. "The article will not lead to sanctification of God ? maybe to the desecration of God by a dangerous group of weirdos. It's way too far from their ability to take it in.

Temple? Sacrifices? In the 21st century? That's insane. Poetry, sayings, old-time tradition, the nation's history ? that can still be countenanced. But as something practical that is being talked about as a real possibility of implementing in our time ? that is beyond their capability to comprehend." As she saw it, to hope that an article in Haaretz would connect people to the great Messianic idea and "implant the subject in the consciousness of the enlightened public in a positive manner" was naive.

The writer of this letter did not come to the joint directorate's monthly meeting, but around the table were a few men and women who did not look especially off-the-wall ? though they may have thought this was my perception of them.

The participants represented the range of Temple movements. The women from the Women's Forum for the Temple, Einat Ziv and Yehudit Dasberg, sat at one end of the long table. In the center, Yehuda Glick ran the meeting in a thunderous voice, and next to him was Prof. Hillel Weiss, a literature teacher from Bar-Ilan University, who is currently chairman of Friends of the Temple and is also involved in activity to restore the Sanhedrin, the ancient Jewish high court of law.

Weiss gained notoriety after making extreme statements that led to a criminal investigation against him. For example, after the evacuation of two Jewish families from the wholesale market in Hebron, in August 2007, Weiss pronounced a curse on the Hebron Brigade commander, Col. Yehuda Fuchs: "May his mother be bereaved, his wife become a widow and his children orphans, and may he be eradicated in the next war." Together with two others who were at the meeting ? the artist Chaim Odem, who is crafting the ritual objects that will be used in a Third Temple, and attorney Baruch Ben-Yosef, chairman of the Movement for the Establishment of the Temple ? Weiss is a member of Lishkat Hagazit ? School of Government.

Lishkat Hagazit is named for the Chamber of Hewn Stone, the area in the Second Temple that was the seat of the Sanhedrin. It describes itself as an independent institution whose aim, according to The Kingship of Israel website, is "to cast the light of Torah upon the question of Jewish Government." The institution has set itself the goal of bringing about "the fulfillment of the three commandments the Israelite nation was given in anticipation of its imminent entry into the Land of Israel: to appoint their king and establish his kingdom, to wipe out the seed of Amalek and to build their Holy Temple."

I noticed one seemingly anomalous figure: an ultra-Orthodox rabbi who sat in a slightly remote corner of the room, engrossed in a holy book of some sort. The Haredim are known to be absolutely against visits by Jews to the Temple Mount. But Rabbi Yosef Elboim, a Belz Hasid and the founder of the Movement for the Establishment of the Temple, broke that taboo some years ago. Although reviled for it by many in his community, he continues to promote the idea of renewing animal sacrifice on the Temple Mount, and in the meantime to visit the site at every opportunity.

Elboim has a message for Haaretz readers, which he delivered without actually speaking to me directly. "There are two nations in Israel, a religious nation and a secular nation," he said. "Two distant nations, different and separate. We could have disregarded the others and said

that there is no need to address this other nation, which does not want to accept us and does not understand us. But we need the seculars in order to bring us down to the lower spheres.

“For us,” he continued, “the problem is how to connect between body and spirit, between flesh and soul. I cannot enter the mind of those who are there, because I am not a penitent, and explain why the Temple is important. It will be the most precious and most joyous thing. Every good thing is attached to the Temple. At present all is desolate, and when it returns all will be rebuilt, from the foundation. All these things shall be repaired. The Jewish culture. We will have a unified nation, a happy nation.”

In the middle of the meeting, Rabbi Yisrael Ariel ? the head of the Temple Institute in the Old City ? entered the room. The excitement was palpable among the participants, and they stood in his honor. Rabbi Ariel, who was a member of the Paratroop Brigade in the Six-Day War and was one of those who reached the Western Wall, is considered one of the key figures in the Temple Mount movements.

The institute he founded is busy reconstructing and recreating all the material elements necessary for a Third Temple to be ready to function. He is particularly involved in the crafting of a mobile altar, which can be installed quickly when sacrifices are again performed.

The atmosphere in the meeting was pleasant, jovial even. Contrary to what the participants may have thought, it is not so difficult for a thoroughly secular person, like me, to understand the plans and ideas they are talking about. The question is whether it’s possible to accept them.

They are proposing what they consider to be the key to solving all of our problems: building a Third Temple. In the meantime, they are trying to get permission to pray on the Temple Mount, where Jewish religious ritual has been prohibited since East Jerusalem was taken by Israeli forces in the 1967 war.

Shortly after the war, the government decided not to allow Jews to pray on the Temple Mount ?(which is known to Muslims as Haram al-Sharif, the Noble Sanctuary, and is the site of two major Muslim holy places, Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock?). Jews could pray below the Mount, at the Western Wall, Israeli authorities decreed.

In terms of religious ritual, the Temple Mount remains a Muslim preserve. According to a survey conducted by the joint directorate of the Temple movements, only 17 percent of Israeli Jews, religious and secular alike, want to see a Third Temple built. However, the numbers shoot up in regard to the possibility of praying on the Temple Mount, with 43 percent of the secular public and 92 percent of the religious public in favor, which averages out to 52 percent of the entire Jewish public.

The police, though, are convinced that allowing Jewish religious ritual to be performed on the Temple Mount will stir unrest among Muslims on a scale that is hard to gauge. Accordingly, the police make every effort to enforce the long-standing government decision, even though this involves repeated skirmishes with the Temple movements. Some of their activists, Yehuda Glick among them, are barred from even approaching the entrance to the Temple Mount.

In the meeting I attended, the discussion revolved around a question that continues to vex the movements’ representatives: whether to keep up political agitation and protest activity against

the police, or to devote their energies to strengthening their ranks and making concrete preparations for the holy work that will be performed in the Temple when it is built.

Prof. Weiss argued passionately that “the energies we expend on an attempt to bring about change that does not stem from our cultural activity are superfluous. The more we ignore the Knesset and the police, the more we will enrich our cause and bring it about for the whole nation. Our energies are not aimed at the police. It is ridiculous to try to persuade them. We are wearing ourselves down and making a mockery of ourselves. We need to move inward. I want to take the movements to a place that is more sensible: a Temple-based state, where the state’s entire content revolves around the Temple.”

At present, the groups’ political activity seems to be yielding results. Ahead of Tisha B’Av, the fast day that commemorates the destruction of both Temples and other disasters that befell the Jewish people, a conference on the subject of the Temple Mount and the Temple was held in the Knesset and attended by MKs Michael Ben Ari (National Union) and Otniel Schneller (Kadima). And a few weeks ago, MK Aryeh Eldad (National Union) submitted a bill that would allow Jews to pray on the Temple Mount and would divide the week into respective days for Muslim and Jewish prayer at the site. However, the movements’ request to pray on the Temple Mount on Yom Kippur was turned down.

Still, on the eve of Rosh Hashanah, the Temple Mount movements were buoyed when the police allowed Rabbi Ariel to visit the Temple Mount, after four months when he had been barred from doing so. The prohibition had been imposed in May, on Jerusalem Day, when he ascended the Mount with a group that included National Union MKs Uri Ariel and Michael Ben Ari, prostrated himself on the ground, recited a blessing and urged the others to do likewise.

A month ago, Rabbi Ariel was summoned to meet with the police officer in charge of the Temple Mount, Chief Superintendent Avi Biton, who informed him that the police had decided to allow him to visit the site again. Similarly, Rabbi Elboim, who had been denied access to the Temple Mount for the past two years after calling for the establishment there of a kollel (a yeshiva for married men) was told that he was free to resume his visits.

On the eve of Rosh Hashanah, the two exercised their restored right and visited the Temple Mount.

### **Angle of vision**

A long line of foreign tourists was waiting at the entrance to the Temple Mount. All were required to go through a security check, which included passing their bags through an x-ray machine and walking through metal detectors. I bypassed the line in order to join a group of women led by Rivka Shimon, from the Women’s Forum for the Temple. They had already made their way into the security checkpoint. The police here are well acquainted with the determined Shimon, and she knows them. Sporting a beret cap and wearing a large temple-shaped pendant on her neck, she explained to the policeman, Moti, that he had to let us in as quickly as possible. The reason? We had a bride with us who was hurrying to complete her preparations for her wedding that evening.

Moti augmented our group with a young, bearded, religiously observant man and assigned us a Border Policeman, who accompanied us throughout our visit to the Temple Mount. Religious-looking Jews do not visit the Temple Mount without a police escort. The reason: fear of provocations by them.

Before ascending to the Mount, I was given a set of strict guidelines to prepare myself for the event. They included immersion in a mikveh, a Jewish ritual purification bath. I promised to do all that was required, including ritual immersion, even though that is not a custom I generally observe, and I kept my promise. I was told to wear cloth shoes to the event.

The group consisted of the young bride on the eve of her wedding; a young religiously observant woman who was recently married; and two sisters, one religious, the other secular. At the entrance gate, the Border Policeman issued precise instructions on how to behave. Because this was the month of Ramadan, no food or drink was to be brought. Also forbidden were praying, bowing, kneeling, singing and anything that might disturb the public order. And have a good day.

“The lucky thing is, you can’t stop me from praying inwardly,” one of the women said. Shimon, the guide, added, “In order to pray, we simply say a psalm before going up to the Mount. You have to do a mental switch. We are not going to see a synagogue. We are coming to the place that is the Mount of the Lord, a place from which the Shechinah ? the divine presence ? has never budged. So all the preparations we did, the immersion and the rest, were for something that is more than a synagogue. The synagogue is a derivative of the Temple; it is a type of imitation.”

Immediately upon entering the Temple Mount compound, we were to cross quickly to its eastern side. “You are not allowed to stop,” the policeman said. “We walk slowly,” Rivka replied. “We have a bride with us.” We entered. “Girls, here is the Temple Mount,” Rivka whispered. The policeman hurried us along, ensuring that we did not move too slowly, let alone stop. The hostile gazes hurled at a group of manifestly religious Jewish women were almost palpable.

A representative of the Waqf, the Muslim religious authority on the Mount, stopped one of the girls in the group, claiming her skirt was not long enough, not modest enough. She untied knots and lengthened the skirt. Rivka drew our attention to the fact that the Herodian columns still contain traces of the gold that once covered them, but the policeman prevented us from approaching them.

Many religiously observant Jews will not set foot on the Temple Mount. They believe it is absolutely forbidden. Groups from the Women’s Forum for the Temple also give the Foundation Stone ?(identified with a rocky outcrop inside the Dome of the Rock?) a wide berth. According to some beliefs, this is the place from which the creation of the world began. During the period of the First Temple ?(957-586 B.C.E.?), the Ark of the Covenant ? in which the tablets of stone with the Ten Commandments on were kept ? was said to have been situated on the Foundation Stone.

According to religious belief, until the ashes of a red heifer are obtained, access to the courtyard of the Temple is prohibited for Jews ?(see Numbers 19:1-22 and Mishna tractate Parah?). Water mixed with the ashes of a red heifer can cleanse people of the impurity of the dead, which clings to everyone. Tradition holds that there have been only nine ritually suitable

red heifers, and that the 10th will appear upon the advent of the Messiah. The absence of the ashes of a red heifer, with the concomitant inability to become ritually clean, is one of the reasons that many Jews are unwilling to visit the Temple Mount. However, the Temple movement activists claim this is only an excuse, and that there is no problem obtaining a red heifer today.

Animal sacrifice was the primary ritual activity in the Temple. Rivka spoke of the practice yearningly. "Today it is hard to understand what sacrifice is," she said. "When a person errs, makes a mistake, sins ? instead of bringing himself, he brings a substitute; he brings either an offering or an animal whose blood atones for his soul. This is something we have lost today. The media always talks about korbanot [the Hebrew word "korban" means both "sacrifice" and "victim"] ? victims of traffic accidents, victims of the peace process, victims of terrorism. And I say to myself, despairingly, that there is a place for korbanot ? and it is here. And what is the root of the word 'korban'? It is from lehitkarev, to draw closer. To draw closer to Hashem. Because it was built at the initiative of mortals, and because the Ark of the Covenant was no longer present ? it disappeared when the First Temple was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar II ? it is considered less holy than its predecessor. We say that we will build the Third Temple ? in other words, that the initiative will come from below but the Lord will extend his divine presence from above," Rivka said.

"What is stopping us from building the Temple now?" one of the women asked. Rivka redirected the question back to her: "You tell me." And immediately added, "The political thing, of course." "It's not because the time has not yet come?" the woman persisted. "That is a matter of interpretation," Rivka said.

The visit was fraught with bitterness on the part of the women: not only because of the uniformed escort, who did not allow them to see what they wanted up close, and kept a close watch to see that no one moved her lips in prayer; but also because of the freedom with which Muslim men and women, and foreign tourists, wandered about the site. At the same time, the prohibitions and hostile looks seemed to infuse the women with a subversive energy that vitalized them, cast an aura of a thrilling and dangerous experience over the event, and vested the visit with special meaning.

But Rivka reminded us that over and above the sheer experience and the historical tales, the visit had a purpose: to understand the essence of the Jewish home through the Temple, as the visit revolved around a bride on her wedding day. Holding up a page containing what looks like a satellite image of planet Earth, she showed how, from a certain angle, the Land of Israel and Jerusalem appear to be at the center of the world, in its innermost circle. "I give lessons to women about modesty," she said. "I show them this image and replace the word 'modesty' with the word 'inwardness.' The innermost circle, the most hidden, is the Land of Israel, Jerusalem, the Temple, the Holy of Holies. What is modesty, what is a modest, inward place? It is hidden, the place least visible to the eye."

But the bride was contentious: "You could take that photograph from a different angle and then Jerusalem will not be in the center." "True," Rivka replied, "but here we see that the State of Israel is at the heart of the world. If the world knew how much it would gain from us building the Temple, they would heap good stones on us, because they will profit from it. The most prosperous countries in the world are the Western ones; China, Africa and Asia are poor."

A questioning eyebrow was raised. "Don't look at the industry," Rivka said. "Look at the miserable people, who are not allowed to have more than one child and don't have proper

housing and suffer from tsunamis and earthquakes. Look at the suffering they are undergoing. And why? Because the Jewish people resides close to the Temple, the world on this side gains; where we do not reside [i.e., the East] the world loses. This is the place that coordinates and pinpoints all the prayers and the connection with the Master of the Universe. If we are not here, they lose. And we lose, too.”

A visit for men, including the groom, was taking place at the same time as our tour, guided by a rabbi. The men progressed more quickly and were also more careful not to draw close to the conjectured area of the Temple courtyard. The two groups met by the eastern wall, next to the olive grove. The Mount of Olives was visible through apertures in the wall. We could see Dominus Flevit (“The Lord Wept”) there, a Roman Catholic church whose courtyard is the conjectured place where the red heifers were burned. Indeed, the remains of a red heifer were actually found there, Rivka said.

The color of the earth in this part of the compound is gray ? it’s the ashes of the burned Temple, Rivka explained. “The last time I came here with a bride, I managed to put a little ash into her bag. Maybe I will be able to do it again today. Here we are actually closest. Here we are allowed to spend a little time. If you want, this is your opportunity to pray. You can already say things now, because no one can see you.”

When the policeman moved off a little, the women quickly bless the young bride. She looked very focused but rushed off to finish her preparations for the emotional evening ahead. Before leaving to be made up and put on her gown, she told me it wasn’t her idea to come here today, but when the idea was broached she felt it was an opportunity that would not soon repeat itself. “I am not one who gets into political arguments,” she said, “and I also did not see the visit as a political event but as a completely religious event. The Jews like to disagree with one another, but I don’t get involved in the disagreements.”

### **Heavenly experience**

We left via a side gate that led into the Muslim Quarter. On the other side of the gate, still within sight of the golden dome, the men started to dance in a circle with the groom and sing “The Temple will be built.” The women watched from the side. An Arab merchant yelled at them to beat it and the group dispersed. The women went to a cafe to digest the experience. Aliya, the young religious woman who was married eight months ago, summed up the thrilling visit.

“I was very shocked that you cannot pray there,” she said. “This is inside the State of Israel. I truly hope there will be a Temple, it will surely be lovely. Not that I know what it means, exactly. I wanted my husband to come, too, but he asked the rabbis and, as far as they are concerned, it is prohibited. I told him that I would go. As far as I am concerned, if there is someone who gives permission, it is alright. I like to see new things. The rabbis forbid it, because they say we don’t know exactly where you can walk there and where you can’t. It’s an experience. I am all for experiences. I was so thrilled, I didn’t manage to pray.”

Rivka Shimon said she joined the Women’s Forum for the Temple about a year and a half ago, after the death of Ben-Yosef Livnat at Joseph’s Tomb in Nablus. (Livnat, a nephew of Culture and Sports Minister Limor Livnat, entered the tomb at night with a group of Hasidim, contrary to army orders, and was shot by a Palestinian policeman.?) “The funeral was on the eve of the last day of Pesach, on the Mount of Olives,” Shimon recalled. “My son said to me, ‘Look, mom, the Arabs are playing soccer on the Temple Mount.’ His words were like a

dagger to my heart. The Lord dragged me by tufts of hair on my head to get involved in this.”

The forum tries to visit the Temple Mount at least twice a month, in order to adjust the timing to the menstrual cycle: The visit must be preceded by ritual immersion and avoidance of sexual relations for 72 hours. “There is a commandment to have relations on Sabbath eve. That means we cannot make the visit on Sunday or Monday, it has to be toward the end of the week. It is gathering momentum. We were instructed by rabbis about what we need to do before going up to the Mount,” said Shimon.

One of the women wondered whether Jews are permitted to visit the Temple Mount, rather than wait for the advent of the Messiah. “I believe that we are obliged to make an effort in everything we do,” Rivka said. “Like Zionism, when we made an effort and there were waves of immigration before the state was established. It’s energetic. It’s in relation to the Lord. You show the Lord that you are making an effort. If you do not go up, you leave a vacuum and it fills with Arabs and goyim. I think the Holy One also needs to do something. Not only us. We are a couple. Man also has to do something.”

Zahava Kronkopf, who came on the visit together with her sister, lives in Tel Aviv’s trendy Neveh Tzedek neighborhood and styles herself a secular woman. She tried to adapt the feelings aroused by the visit to her conceptual universe: “My experience was that we are here in the holiest place and the situation around me is of Arabs, and I cannot pray. There is a message here. I think the message is, ‘You need to work on yourselves outside before you come to me’ ? if we give it the title of a place of fraternity, a place of peace. And the message has to come from a place of inward work.”

Rivka interpreted Zahava’s remarks in a way that is more suited to her approach. “You’re right,” she said. “I prepare myself for this visit and I try to find a place of peace. In the Knesset conference, I said that if [social activist] Daphni Leef knew how powerfully the Temple Mount affects us economically for the good, she and her friends would hurry to support the building of the Temple, because it truly radiates on every aspect of our life. Why does the money leak out of our pocket? Because we are not performing sacrifices.”

I asked another participant, Osnat Berger, Kronkopf’s sister, what drew her to the visit. “My girlfriends think I have become a weirdo,” she said. “I was interested in the visit, and not only from the religious point of view ? even though I am religious. I’d heard that it was a heavenly experience. It was an experience for me, and I still have to digest it. I found it interesting, including all the interaction around us, the Arabs, the action. It is not a calm place, it is like a volcano. Suddenly I understood how a volcano works.”

*Did you try to pray?*

“I prayed a lot, mostly for the children. Once in a while I gave the policeman a defiant look and tried to move my lips, to see how he would react. But I think they are a little more lenient toward women.”

*Do you think the Temple should be rebuilt?*

“I don’t know. I don’t know enough to decide. That is why I am asking. I know I wanted to be there. I have no doubt that I will go again. I already told my husband on the phone, ‘You have to go up, too.’”

Despite the uncertainties, Berger is already imagining the day after the Third Temple is

dedicated. "What will be the attitude of nonreligious people toward the Temple?" she asked Rivka. "After all, it comes from a halakhic place" ? a reference to Jewish religious law. Rivka seemed surprised by the question. "When nonreligious people come to the Temple, they will consult with religious authorities about how to perform sacrifices, about where they are allowed to walk," she said. "And people will come. It will be an experience. People are looking for experiences. Young people are looking for attractions. The Temple Mount gives them that, the experience of the Temple."

## **Guarding the Temple**

Located not far from the Temple Mount is the Temple Institute, founded by Rabbi Yisrael Ariel in 1987. It has a display of vessels and accoutrements that will enable ritual service to take place in the Temple. These include the garments of the high priest, the "table of the showbread" (Exodus 25:30?), musical instruments, a large chandelier, even a small altar. The vessels are kept in glass cases, alongside oil paintings that depict scenes from the life of the ancient Temple.

According to Arnon Segal, 32, a journalist for the right-wing newspaper Makor Rishon and a leading activist in the Temple movements, the only two vessels that are not yet ready are the Ark of the Covenant, which cannot be reconstructed because it contained the stone tablets from Mount Sinai, and the huge external altar, on which the sacrifices were performed. In the meantime, the institute is trying to build a smaller, mobile altar. But the work is complicated, because the altar must be made of uncut stones. The institute's experts are scouring the Dead Sea for stones for the project.

The reconstruction of the vessels, some of which are made of gold, costs hundreds of thousands of shekels. The money has come from philanthropists. Most of the vessels were crafted by the metalsmith Chaim Odem, from the settlement of Ofra, who is known in the institute as "the modern Bezalel" (referring to Bezalel Ben Uri, the biblical artisan who designed the Tabernacle and its ritual objects?). Standing opposite the Western Wall is a seven-branched menorah, Odem's reconstruction, in gold, of the original in the Second Temple.

As a Levite, Segal plans to take part in the forthcoming reestablishment of the Levite Guards. The task of the Levites was to sing and guard the Temple, and that involves a great deal of preparation, he said. The Temple Institute is also planning to establish a school for the priesthood: When the Third Temple opens, they say, it will need priests who are already familiar with their work.

*Why do the Jews need to build the Temple? After all, it's just a structure.*

Segal: "No, it is a whole substance. It is a whole part of Judaism that was lost. The Temple complex is an existential part of Judaism that we erased. We erased the whole public side of Judaism. We know only the personal commandments. All the public commandments were erased. There is no commandment to build a Temple. Because it is the nation that commands the establishment of a Temple, and not any private individual, no one thinks he is personally responsible for it."

For Segal and his colleagues, the Temple is the crowning glory of a whole way of life they want to restore. It includes animal sacrifices, the institution of the Sanhedrin (the judicial, legislative and executive authority) and many more elements of a Jewish society that existed

two millennia ago.

Segal is the son of Haggai Segal, a journalist and right-wing activist who spent two years in prison in the 1980s after being convicted of causing grievous harm, being in possession of a weapon and being a member of the Jewish Underground terrorist group. The group carried out assassination attempts on Palestinian mayors in the West Bank. Contrary to what might be believed, the young Segal did not spend his childhood on the Temple Mount.

“There was a lot of talk about the Temple Mount at home,” he said, “but the concrete possibility of visiting the site was not presented to me. I went there for the first time when I was 19. But like every other Jew, I pray for it three times a day and I wanted to take seriously what I say. I say, ‘Next year in rebuilt Jerusalem’ ? and I am in rebuilt Jerusalem. The impression is that the absolute majority adopted this as a mantra, as lip service, but at some point the penny dropped for me. As a Jewish boy in the Land of Israel, no one told me that it is possible to go up to the Temple Mount, and that it is possible to build the Temple today. The rabbis said that the time has not yet come, but that’s not how it works. The Lord did not say to wait for the Messiah, he said to make a Temple.”

*The Jewish Underground, of which your father was a member, planned to blow up Al-Aqsa Mosque.*

“It is important for me to be accurate and say that there was not just one Jewish underground group, and that my father had nothing to do with that [the bombing] and knew nothing about it until it was published in the media. In fact, the people who thought of the idea also shelved it. There was no agreement that that was the right thing to do. Contrary to the usual image of those who are involved with the Temple, they are a great deal more soul-searching and hesitant than people think. People did not want to join with Yehuda Etzion, who was the one who raised the idea [of blowing up the mosque].

“I think it is nonsensical to blow up [Al-Aqsa Mosque]. We would not have achieved anything by doing that. That is not how to solve issues. The Arabs are against the Jewish presence on the Temple Mount as such. If the State of Israel were to permit sacrifices to be made, that would already be enough to make me jump for joy. Obviously my inspiration is from home, but not from a fanatic place. I was not brought up to hate Arabs. But an as-yet unattained Jewish national purpose and the concept of the Temple Mount ? those are definitely notions I got at home.”

Segal lives just a few hundred meters from the Temple Mount, in the City of David area of the Palestinian village of Silwan. He writes a column on the Temple Mount for Makor Rishon and with his wife, Ma’ayan, is raising four children, whom he takes to the Temple Mount at every opportunity. “They love to come here,” he said. His wife supports the cause, though she does not visit the Temple Mount because she is “apprehensive of the frustration that accompanies the ascent,” Segal said.

Segal insists that the debate over the Temple Mount is basically an internal Jewish issue and is not related to the conflict with the Arabs. “I am not an enemy of the Arabs. I do not say that I don’t want Arabs on the Mount. Even Rabbi Dov Lior said that all nations are permitted to pray on the Mount. We will not tell others not to pray to God on the Mount, even though the Muslims do not respect our right to pray there. I am ready to leave them Al-Aqsa. But Al-Aqsa is not the whole Mount.”

He is critical of the rabbis for collaborating with the political policy makers in making people forget about the Temple Mount. “The rabbis decreed a ban of excommunication in regard to visiting the Temple Mount,” he said. “After 1967, there were people who wanted to go up to the Mount immediately and perform sacrifices. But a status quo was achieved within a week and a half, and Moshe Dayan and the rabbis collaborated and succeeded in removing the Mount from the thoughts of the average Jew. It was a collaboration that encompassed the political and rabbinical policy makers, in order to delay the redemption. The redemption arrived in the Six-Day War, but then they reversed course. The State of Israel did not even want to capture the Old City or the Temple Mount. Moshe Dayan said, ‘I want none of that Vatican.’ And the rabbinate collaborated with that.”

*Why don't more Jews have an interest in building a new Temple?*

“I see that attitude as an affliction of the Diaspora. It is absolute degeneration. You read one thing and you automatically translate it into something else. It's all metaphors. It is a Catholic influence. I don't think that even if I were to sneak into the Dome of the Rock and blow it up, that would advance the redemption. That is not a serious way to think. Obviously there has to be a critical mass from within the people of Israel. But I am trying to exert influence.

“I find that it is much easier for secular people to understand this, because religious people have a lot of excuses,” Segal continued. “The dominant voices say we need to wait. I am not a violent person and I am not trying to do anything by force, but I am truly trying to achieve this. The spirit will come of itself. I think that people are put off by the idea. ‘What, are we now going to start performing sacrifices? No one in the Western world performs sacrifices.’ But to shake a lulav [a ceremonial palm frond, done on Sukkot] or to perform ritual circumcision sounds just as pagan. I don't think performing sacrifices is a pagan act, we are just not accustomed to it. After all, everyone slaughters animals, so what makes it pagan? The fact that part of it is sacrificed on an altar?”

### **Post-Zionism and the Temple**

Dr. Ron Naiweld, who studies the literature of Hazal (the ancient Jewish sages) at CNRS (the National Center for Scientific Research) in France, and is doing research on the “rabbinization” of the Jewish world, sees the growth of the Temple movements as part of a post-Zionist trend. “The Zionist project has, in a way, run its course, and in its place movements are arising that are asking questions about the substance, content and legitimacy of that project,” he said. “It is yet another post-Zionist movement, really? like the ‘state of all its citizens’ idea. It's a movement that said: ‘Zionism has brought us to here and now it's time to move on, to continue from here. And this is the time of our redemption.’”

“The religious redemption discourse possesses a logic of its own,” he continued. “The issue of the Temple remains a last protuberance, a dangling tooth that enables the religious Zionists to say, in the face of the religious injunction not to hasten the end, ‘Look, we are not hastening the end; when it comes to the Temple, we are waiting.’ It remains a last, disconnected remnant from all the rest of the activity of the religious Zionist movement. The messianic fervor, which assumed strong activist traits in the settlement project, shunted everything else aside. You cling to every bit of desolate land of a downtrodden Palestinian village, but you forgo the Temple Mount? There really is no logic to it. Until 1967, there was a compromise between two types of discourse, but after 1967, religious Zionism became more militant, with messianic fervor gaining the upper hand over pragmatism.”

From the time of the Second Temple, Naidel explained, there have been two approaches in the Jewish world to the essence of halakhic law. “Daniel Schwartz addressed this subject 20 years ago in a groundbreaking article. There is the approach of the priests, which presents a realistic conception of halakha, holding that the law is determined by the nature of things. In other words, something will be pure or impure because it is pure or impure by the nature of its creation; because God created it pure or impure. In the face of this, there is the Pharisaic-rabbinical conception of the law, which is a nominalist concept. It holds that the halakha was determined by the human agent, which in the case of the Talmud consists of a group of rabbis who decide whether something is pure or impure, and this categorization does not derive from the inherent nature of the things.

“The struggle between these two approaches existed throughout Jewish history,” he added. “In the Second Temple period, it is seen in the struggle between the Pharisees and the Sadducees. You can see it in the form of people like [the late] Yeshayahu Leibowitz, who sanctify the law, the halakha, which is the determining element: intellectual religiosity, as compared with messianic movements? for whom halakha is divine law, because it expresses the true nature of objects and of human beings. That is why viewpoints like this will assume a very essentialist direction in terms of racism as well, because of the difference between Jews and Gentiles: A Jew is by the nature of his creation a purer being. Similarly with the holiness of the land: The soil of Israel is essentially holier, the stones are holier because the land was destined by God to serve as the place of the Children of Israel.”

*Can it be said that these movements are the avant-garde of contemporary Judaism?*

“It is an avant-garde that is the expression of an almost inevitable development of the Zionist project. And secular Zionism has nothing of interest to offer that can withstand these arguments. After all, the redemption is already under way; the Jews have already returned to the Land of Israel and the settlement enterprise is highly active. It doesn’t make sense for that activism to stop just before the Temple. That is the next logical target. There is no reason to stop at the Holy of Holies. If everything is so holy, then what is holiest is even more holy.”

*Where do the Arabs fit into this story?*

“The realistic priestly approach says that the Jews as people are holier. So another aspect of the priestly awakening is the racist offensive of recent years, which we see in post-Zionists of this sort. The transition from a priestly religion to a nominalist religion after the destruction of the Temple is accompanied, as I see it, by a kind of spiritual progress, because it gives people the possibility to set the value of things, restores responsibility to them and does not assert that the value is set by God and that man has nothing to say about this. Here we have

something of a turnaround, a dangerous regression. It's not by chance that it contains pagan elements."

Segal not only agrees with Nawiweld's view that this is a post-Zionist phenomenon, he seems to like the idea. "Zion is Mount Zion," he said. "We are the true Zionists. Religious Zionism is incapable of generating any process by itself. It straggled along behind Zionism for a hundred years, and as soon as that was over, it tried to continue by itself and went to Yesha [Judea, Samaria, Gaza]. There are people who 'seize the horns of the altar' [in the biblical phrase] and say we must not act, because the public at large is not yet at that point. I think we need to act."

But Segal does not accept the annulment of sacrificial practices as a positive development of Judaism. "There is no serious source that claims the sacrifices have to be ended," he said. "It's just a matter of habit. Some people think the redemption has arrived, and they do not grasp the absence. The absence is that we do not truly have Judaism. All the prayers are only a substitute for the real thing. The prayers were institutionalized after the Temple was destroyed. It is only a memory of something. But what about true Judaism? We are not true Jews, we are only perpetuating something that existed in the past."

*What is the Temple meant to do?*

"It is the heart of Judaism. Numerically, one-third of the 613 commandments are not fulfilled today because of the absence of a Temple. The Temple is the Jewish public sphere that we lost. I want a transnational Judaism, which will encompass all the commandments. The rabbis will not confine themselves solely to the synagogue. A Sanhedrin is needed. That is an inspirational institution. People would come there and be impressed by the light that exists in Judaism. The Jews are one religion, not a collection of sects. A temple is something that is built together."

*Why in Israel? Why on the Temple Mount?*

"This is where it is supposed to be. I accept Judaism as a totality. Judaism defined the place. It is the place that Hashem chose. In the meantime, the tension around the Temple Mount persists, even though the State of Israel decided to forgo the Temple Mount. For 45 years, it has been a Muslim site. It is not because of the Jews that the tension does not abate. The reason is that one side constantly demands and the other side constantly capitulates ? that is not a recipe for quiet. I do not want to expel anyone, but I do not want to capitulate."

"I don't think the Arab states are lovers of Zion, even now; if they could destroy us, they would already have done it. The Temple Mount will not irk them more than other things. But there is a limit to how much punishment you can inflict on the victims. If the police are strong enough to secure the Pride Parade in Jerusalem, they can secure Jewish ritual on the Mount. If we are determined enough, the other side will also sit quietly."

"In 1995, Bibi [Benjamin Netanyahu] wrote to Yehuda Etzion to say that when we come to power, we will see to it that Jews pray on the Temple Mount," Segal said. "A bill sponsored by Aryeh Eldad is now coming up, but I have no doubt that it will not even get to the voting stage. Netanyahu is not an ideologue. He manages to pull the wool over everyone's eyes."

*If the Temple is supposed to forge a better society, as your movement claims, and you say it need not happen through violence, how does it connect with those who are pursuing the path of Meir Kahane? Why do these movements have members who are extreme in their xenophobia, such as MK Michael Ben Ari and others?*

“The joint directorate cannot be selective about the people who join our ranks. If we are, we will remain alone. But in general, in my column I prefer to have A.B. Yehoshua write about the Temple, and not Michael Ben Ari, because I want to emerge from my particular milieu. I admit that I do not understand what militant declarations are trying to achieve. When [settler activist] Daniella Weiss says, ‘This will be a halakhic state,’ what is she trying to achieve? I also did not like the argument that [settler activist] Itamar Ben Gvir had with Noa Rothman [Yitzhak Rabin’s granddaughter]. The bigger the talk, the fewer the deeds. People who want to do things do not quarrel with others in the media. After a march in the City of David, I wrote that it was a prize for the leftists. You proved that you are quarreling with the whole world, but all you did was inflate a problem. You achieved nothing by the march, all it did was generate tension.

“I see nothing wrong about the Temple. I see it as the End of Days” Segal said. “It will not come at the expense of something else. It should be the dream of us all, not the nightmare of us all. I do not want to be a minority waiting for a hammer blow from on high that will kill all the heretics. Redemption did not arrive because of the militancy and violence by a minority against the majority. It was the joint will of the people. When Jews accepted the partition plan in 1947, they did not want war. From my point of view, this is the same thing. We are not violent, we want to get along. It is not an argument with the Arabs. But they never agree to anything. Ever.”

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