

## IT'S ALL ABOUT SEX!!

**T**here is a new organization called the Holy Places Authority, in direct competition with the National Parks Authority, that seeks to control a number of archaeological sites, famous tombs, and other religious sites in the country. David's tomb on Mt. Zion is one, the tomb of the Rambam in Tiberias another, Elijah's cave on the Carmel a third, and there is, of course, the Western Wall. Holy places all, run by the religious establishment, which really means the most reactionary of the ultra-Orthodox because they set the tone. Problem is that their relation to holy places is becoming weirder and weirder. Evidence the new walkway along the Western Wall plaza.

What seems to be bothering the religious most of all is the matter of separating men from women. Many of the tomb monuments in the north were never much architecturally to begin with but Elijah's cave was a good space with good vibes, the tomb of Shimon Bar Yohai near Safed was interesting, as was Meir Ba'al Ha-Nes in Tiberias. And the Rambam tomb was actually an effective architectural composition.

They are all ruined aesthetically now, as is David's Tomb, by great wooden screens—men on one side and women on the other<sup>1</sup>—going down the middle of them. The space is broken and coherence is lost. And now there has appeared one of the strangest things I ever saw: a walkway with a handrail running north-south along the whole length of the back wall of the Western Wall plaza. And a big sign posted at each end: **PASSAGE FOR MEN ONLY**. This latest effort joins a large sign put up at all the entrances to the Wall that says "Because of the Holiness of the Place, it is imperative to separate men from women."

What on earth is going on here? What are they so afraid of? What is it about orthodox religion that is so afraid of any possible contact between men and women? Truth is, I don't know the answer. But I know that the very first thing orthodoxy—every orthodoxy!—does is suppress women. They cover women's bodies, their hair, their faces. They shave their heads, put them in separate (always inferior) places, and most of all keep them away from men at prayer.

Muslims, Buddhists, and religious Catholic and Orthodox Christian nuns do exactly the same thing. And the Jews, alas, are no better. We do it too, and I am ashamed that (to give one example) 50% of the

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<sup>1</sup> The orthodox even tried to put such a separation screen down the middle of the great plaza at the Western Wall, but that didn't last very long. Don't know who stopped it.

population gets barely 20% of the space along the Wall. Not to mention getting screwed by a religious system dominated by men and favoring men at every turn.

When we see a phenomenon which seems to be nearly universal, at least in this part of the world, then we are allowed to make a generalization. And the generalization we can make is that the enemy of religion is sex. Women are a distraction, especially to men at prayer. They take your mind off spiritual things and arouse passions and lusts which interfere with the spiritual life of the man involved, his concentration, devotion to God, etc. So they say.

I can't even guess at what kind of self-image these men have that they need to defend themselves so ferociously against fatal attractions from the opposite sex. But I see it happening, and getting worse, as the Orthodox take over more and more public places.

That "Men Only" passage along the Western Wall makes no sense at all because at either end of it are the open public areas of the Old City, where contact with the opposite sex, Jewish or otherwise, is unavoidable. So what's the problem at the Wall? Why do the men need to segregate themselves by that handrail there and nowhere else? Maybe because that's the place you pray at, and everybody knows how dangerous contact with women is at that kind of place. Whatever, it gives me the willies.

The Western Wall gets stranger and stranger, the guides at the Tunnels get more and more Holy (I've met only one or two exceptions) and the more I go to the Wall the less I like that place altogether. ■