



The Half Shekel Journal by Ed Rice
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The overwhelming experiencing of history, resent tensions, and paganness emanated from our walk on the Via Dolorosa, and captured the afternoon. I wished there were time to explore each avenue with greater insight but we were shortly headed to the bus. I could not keep my bearing walking in this city. When the bus headed to the Moriah Classic, which was supposed to be a short walk from the Western Wall, which we were to visit after supper, all hope of getting any bearing was lost. Danny navigated the large bus down narrow streets and around tight circles as though he had done this for 30 years. He had.

We met with excitement in the lobby of the motel, eager to venture out onto the streets of Jerusalem at night. Supper had been exceptional and gratefully received in all its Josher bounty. Our after supper 'business meeting' with Brian and Marilyn as the representative of Christian Journeys was less Kosher but just as gratefully received.

Christian Journeys had called in all its favors and cut back all its profits to extend to us this Pastor's Familiarization tour at almost half fare, and wanted us to feel an obligation to come back on a full fare tour leading 20 people along with us. That sounds less tactful than what they were as the meeting was very informative in detailing the cooperative professionalism of Christian Journeys, and their associated guides, bus drivers, airlines, and accommodations. It took a miracle that this gruff retired military officer could pastor a dozen precious people for a dozen years. The likelihood of getting 20 that he could lead to Israel loomed as even less likely, but nobody enjoyed such a prospect as I.

The evening was cool as we filed out into the street. A few, who wanted to illustrate how very cold it was back in Canada, came with tee shirts and no coats for their object lesson. Bev and I were grateful for our coats and sweaters, striving for comfort over object lesson. Brian bubbled with excitement as he led this exhausted but exhilarated group across the boulevard and down the streets to view, for our very first time, the 57 meters of exposed ancient wall on the western edge of the Temple mount. These bottom 7 layers of Herod's retaining wall, which extended the plateau of the first and second temple area to a huge leveled platform to hold his massive temple renovation project, began to be called the wailing wall in the 19th century. Christians seeing the incessant reverent weeping of Jews at this last standing portion of their holy temple coined the phrase. The Jew call it only the Western Wall, and did so with such reverence that I also dropped the wailing wall nomenclature.

For all the fuss made about our safety in visiting Israel during the Gaza strip's rocket attacks against her, we found these back streets of Jerusalem safer than any city street I had frequented in America at night. Although told they would not let my weapon through airport security, it was assuring to know that one in three citizens here had one on ready. Progressive liberal in control of my government do not understand the robbery and rape deterrence of a well armed citizenry. Our evening walk to the wall down the



narrow streets of Jerusalem was in the least always pleasant and often overwhelming with joy and wonder.

At the wall there were separate entrances for the women to use and a separate portion of wall where they were confined. I was told, not that men should have their head



covered, but that we should put on a paper Kippah available at the entry. Again my military training had well instilled the necessity for a head covering while outside and its removal inside, with result that I almost always wore a hat outside, I had one on here but did not understand that it was suitable coverage of my head to respect the Jewish tradition. I removed it and donned their paper Kippah (Hebrew) or Yarmulke (Yiddish).

On my first visit to the Western Wall I was equally laden with ignorance and excitement. The Bible tells me to pray

with my head cover off, Jewish tradition here said I must keep the Kippah on. We were told earlier to NEVER turn your back on the wall but to respectfully back away while facing it. I had supposed that if one did turn their back to the wall and face some of the many well armed soldiers ever present at the wall, that they would just shoot you on the spot. It that be so what would they do to a Christian who removed his head covering to pray? No matter the danger of violating tradition I stood at the Western Wall of the temple with 2 hats in my hand and one hand on the wall and completed my promise to me, to pray for each member of our Church by name, each missionary we support and each family member I know. It was good to have ample time at our first visit here. I donned my paper hat and respectfully backed away from the wall, not sure exactly when I could turn to watch the black gowned orthodox Jews bobbing back and forth all around me. It was as natural a thought as could occur, and not meant with any disregard, but those with the grandest 'bob' obviously thought themselves the most pious prayers. One young fellow with side burn curls repeatedly pounding his Kippah then forehead was obviously filled with hypocritical sincerity in his prayer time. There was apparent much sincere praying and weeping at this wall but the showy bobbing was a perpetual distraction from it. As I walked down the wall and into the culvert area under the city above I did notice that sincerity often increases and bobbing decreased with age. Some of our group was waiting for our walk back to the motel as I turned in my paper Kippah, donned my hat and walked with the few last stragglers who would have stayed longer at this awesome site.

It seems foolish when written but when reunited with Bev I asked her if she prayed. I wanted that we could pray together at the wall but the motel room would now suffice. The stroll back to the motel was submerged in conversation about being at the wall. The stop for cappuccinos was like icing on dessert. We tried to recall Ronny's accounting of turning down 3 Bedouin's offers for coffee then drinking 3 one third cups. One third for a blessing to ones soul, one third for a blessing to ones health, and one third for a blessing to ones family. We drank our coffee by thirds but did not exactly recall what it had to do with befriending a Muslim Bedouin. We absorbed so much information on this trip that my pencil was dull and mind overflowing.