

The Ultimate Claim to the Temple Mount

Category: Bereishis, Bereishis

The history of the Temple mount, and its reflection in the story of Cain and Abel.

The UN Decision About the Temple Mount

In October of 2016, the U.N. body called UNESCO decided to adopt an Arab-led resolution that imposed doubt on the Jewish right to the Temple Mount.

It's somewhat amusing, because the mountain of evidence attesting to the Jewish presence there only grows. In recent years, an archaeological tile expert named Frankie Snyder succeeded in bringing forth another proof of the existence of the Second Temple. A cache of colored stones that she and a group of archaeological activists found were discovered to be the remnant of the beautiful outdoor tiles that covered the courtyards and passageways of the Second Beis Hamikdash.

In the first century BCE, the Second Temple was restored by King Herod. And a key part of the restoration project included brand-new outdoor tiling in the then popular Roman style called *opus sectile*. This style is defined by its usage of geometric shapes—primarily triangles, diamonds and stars, and the reassembled tiles give today's world a sample of the eye-catching beauty and color of Herod's magnificent restoration of the Beis Hamikdash.

“Every area of exposed outdoor floor space was paved with colored tiles, each made of different kinds of stone,” writes Josephus in his book “Wars of the Jews” (Vol. V, Chap. 5). Their appearance was so impressive that even Josephus had difficulty describing their beauty: “Who can describe the tiling work of these builders? Stone of various expensive types brought in from every country...” (Vol. V, Chap. 4).

The irony here is that Ms. Snyder's exciting discovery would have not been brought to the world were it not for the fact that in November of 1999, the Waqf, the Islamic religious body that currently has control of the Temple Mount,

engaged in a deliberate, vicious and irresponsible destruction of archaeological artifacts that were thousands of years old.

In the space of one week, under the direct instruction of the Waqf, heavy machinery dug up huge amounts of soil for the purposes of expanding the entrance area to the mosque currently occupying the Temple Mount. This digging took place in the Temple Mount area known as Solomon's Stables, and it was done without any archaeological oversight. Dozens of truckloads of dirt from the Temple Mount were dumped at two locations in Jerusalem.

And so, about five years after that, Israel's Antiquities Authority got permission to begin sifting through the mountains of dirt to try to fish out archaeological details from every previous era. And it was through that sifting that Ms. Snyder found remains from the Holy Temple.

The Fourth Generation Christian

Now, this Frankie Snyder who made this critical discovery has a very interesting background herself.

Ms. Snyder was born into a very Catholic home in Richmond, Virginia of 1948. She was raised thoroughly Christian, but the grapevine in her church community spoke of a different history altogether—and as a result, Frankie discovered that her maternal grandmother had been Jewish.

Her grandmother's name was Mrs. Stella Schwartzberg. At age five, she became deaf, and at age eight, she was stricken with some sort of brain inflammation and her mother also passed away. At that point, her father realized that he couldn't raise five children on his own—so he kept the two older ones with him at home, and sent the younger three to live with Jewish families in Georgia.

However, young Stella wasn't sent by her Jewish foster parents to Hebrew School. Instead, they sent her to a school for the deaf, which was Christian. And so even when she completed school at age 16 and went back home to her father, she stayed part of the deaf community, and not the tiny Jewish community of Richmond which at the time didn't know how to integrate people with disabilities. So it was in the deaf community that she met her husband, with whom she would regularly go to church because it was the only house of prayer in the region that

provided a sign language interpreter.

And so Frankie's mother—Stella's daughter—considered herself a regular Christian, and married a Catholic when she grew up. But the whispering about her religious identity didn't stop. There was constant talk somehow about how she was really Jewish.

That's because, as it turns out, Jewishness goes by the mother.

And so Frankie asked her mother about it many times, but she always got the same answer: "Grandma wasn't Jewish anymore, and neither am I, and therefore, neither are you. We go to church, not to synagogue, and therefore, so do you." And that's how the discussion always ended—and when you tell a kid the same thing again and again, he or she will ultimately believe it.

In 1970, Frankie Snyder married a U.S. Air Force pilot, but her questions about faith grew stronger. It was then that she started reading the Tanach—and at the very moment she started Genesis, she immediately understood that she belonged to the Jewish People. However, she was 30 years old, married and mother of two children at the time, and it was very hard for her to leave it all behind and formally convert to Judaism—especially since her husband's active duty had them living in places with virtually no Jews, like Guam, Alaska and South Dakota.

The turning point in her life came when her own daughter went to college in Boston—and Ms. Snyder, after her divorce, went to live with her. Suddenly, there were Jews everywhere—her daughter represented a fourth generation of Jewish women not raised as such, but here they were in a dorm whose population was 25-percent Jewish. So at that stage, it was much easier to "come back home," and so she decided to return to Judaism.

Once in Boston, Ms. Snyder was able to delve into the Tanach and thoroughly explore her own Jewishness. She minored in Judaism and the Tanach. And thus in early 2007, she found herself making Aliyah to Israel and renting an apartment in Jerusalem.

It was then that she heard about the Temple Mount Sifting Project, which she shortly joined. After two weeks of volunteer work, the project's leaders realized that they could use her expertise, and she was hired for full-time work. And after several months on the job, they asked her to start giving talks and speeches to

groups of English-speaking volunteers.

Today, her English-language presentations are her primary job duty. But between her talks and speeches, she still continued sifting the dirt along with the Project's volunteers. Once every few days, they would find a stone or a shard in a unique geometric shape. Ms. Snyder, whose first major was mathematics and statistics (with a minor in mathematics), came to the Sifting Project with a mathematical background—and it became clear that it was the precise knowledge needed to reconstruct the original floor pattern of the Temple Mount.

The History of the Temple Mount

Now the Jewish Nation's connection with the Temple Mount goes back 3,000 years.

The Books of Shmuel (Samuel) and Divrei HaYamim (Chronicles) tell us that King David one day decided to take a census of the Jewish Nation (and everyone knows that by Jewish law, you're not allowed to directly count Jews), and so he instructed Yoav, his top general, to take a count.

General Yoav begged the king to not do it because it would only trigger an "Evil Eye," but King David insisted—and his order caused an epidemic that killed some 70,000 people.

But then, the Tanach (Divrei HaYamim I:21) tells us, "David lifted his eyes and saw the angel of G-d standing between the earth and the heavens, and his sword was drawn forth in his hand, suspended over Jerusalem, and David and the elders fell... on their faces... and the angel of G-d said to Gad to say to David that David shall go up to erect an altar unto the L-rd in the silo of Arnon the Yevusi." In other words, the angel stood over the Temple Mount and told King David that the way to stop the epidemic was to build an altar at the place he was standing, which was the place that King Solomon later built the Beis Hamikdash.

So King David approached Arnon (or Aravna, as he is called in the Book of Shmuel) and asked him if he could buy the place; "Give it to me for full price, and stop the epidemic!"

But Aravna presented him with the property free of charge, and even volunteered

to donate wood for the offerings on the altar, as well as wheat for the Mincha flour offerings. "I gave everything," he said, according to the Tanach. But still, King David insisted otherwise: "No, for I will surely acquire [it] for full price."

This is rather strange: Here we are in the middle of an epidemic, with victims dying every minute and Aravna himself offering the property in question free of charge! Just build that altar already and stop the epidemic! Why is King David insisting on paying full price for the property? Well, as King David himself answers: "For I shall not raise up to the L-rd that which is yours, with the burnt offerings going up free."

King David is teaching us the "secret" of the Korbanos, the sacrifices: If a person wants his sacrifice to be accepted, the first thing is that it must belong to him. It must be his property, and something he worked on—not something that someone gave him as a gift.

That brings us to today's Torah reading.

The First Sacrifice

In today's Torah reading, we read about the first-ever sacrifice brought in human history. One fine day, Kayin (Cain) hits upon a wonderful new idea: to bring a sacrifice to G-d. And so he brings "from the fruits of the earth an offering unto the L-rd." His brother Hevel (Abel) saw what he had done and was jealous of him: "And Hevel *also* brought of the first-born of his flock, and G-d turned to Hevel and his offering, and to Kayin and his offering He did not turn" (Bereishis 4:3).

Why did G-d not accept Kayin's offering? After all, he was the first to come up with the idea of offering something to G-d! What was not good about Kayin's offering that G-d did not accept it?

Rashi explains that the reason is that Kayin brought from "the worst," and you need to give G-d the best. But it doesn't say that explicitly in the Torah.

Some explain that the precise wording of the verse lends itself to a different reason for G-d's rejection of Kayin's offering: Regarding Kayin, one verse states, "And Kayin was a tiller of the soil," in the past tense, and the following verse states, "*Now it came to pass at the end of days*, that Kayin brought of the fruit of

the soil an offering to the L-rd”—meaning that a long time had elapsed since Kayin had last worked the soil. (As for why Kayin was a *former* farmer, that perhaps can be explained with the same reason for which Hevel was never a worker of the soil—“Because the earth was cursed,” as Rashi says, “he abstained from working it.”)

It is at that point that the Torah tells us that that Kayin brought an offering “of the fruits of the earth,” while Hevel brought a sacrifice “from the first-born of *his* flock”—meaning that Hevel brought something that was his, while Kayin may indeed have brought a sacrifice “of the fruits of the earth,” but not of *his soil*. Rather, his offering was from “public property.”

The law with the Bikurim (First Fruits) sacrifices, for example, is that a person can only bring Bikurim from that which belongs to him. In Temple times, Bikurim were not brought at all when there was a Shmita (Sabbatical) year—because during Shmita, all fields became public and free for all. So even though anyone is allowed to take and eat any fruit in any field, you still can’t bring to G-d something that you didn’t work for (Meiri, Yevamos 74a). (Also see Hisvaduyos 5751, Vol. IV pg. 329 et al.)

So, perhaps we can explain that since Kayin did not bring a sacrifice from his own resources, G-d did not accept his sacrifice.

And what’s interesting about the entire saga of the sacrifices of Kayin and Hevel is that, as the Rambam says, “There is a universal tradition that the *site* of the altar that David and Solomon built *in Aravna’s silo is [the site of] the altar* upon which Kayin and Hevel offered their sacrifices, as well as that of Adam, who offered a sacrifice when he was created” (Rambam, Hilchos Beis Habechirah 2:2).

Thus, the Temple Mount is the place where it all started. And so ultimately, U.N. resolutions don’t matter—the only thing that counts is that “the Word of our L-rd shall stand forever.”

Good Shabbos!