

Parsha Pearls

FROM THE WORDS OF THE GEDOLIM

Vayakhel 5768

And let all who are wise of heart among you come and make all that Hashem commanded. (35:10)

A certain famous Zionist rabbi was challenged by his contemporaries to explain why he associated with the secular Zionist pioneers who disregarded the laws of the Torah. "Can it be that Eretz Yisroel will be built by young men and women who publicly violate the Torah? Is this not a desecration of the holiness of the land?"

"Absolutely not!" replied the rabbi. "Just think about it. The holiest place in Eretz Yisroel is undoubtedly the Temple, and the holiest place in the Temple is the Holy of Holies. Now, when the Temple stood in its place, no one was allowed to enter the Holy of Holies, except for the Kohein Gadol. And even the Kohein Gadol was only allowed to enter once a year – on Yom Kippur – after painstaking preparations, wearing his white linen garments, to perform the sacred service of the day. Nonetheless, when the Temple was being built, workers and artisans from the entire spectrum of Judaism undoubtedly entered the place. Even simple folk, who were not particularly known for their piety, entered the site of the Temple. They even went all the way in to the Holy of Holies whenever they wanted, wearing regular work clothes, until the Temple was completed."

It is unbelievable that such a ridiculous comparison is still repeated today, and was quoted with approval in a book published just two years ago. The Tabernacle in the desert was built by the righteous Betzalel and his assistants from the greatest generation of Jews who ever lived, the generation of prophets who heard the voice of G-d at Sinai. The workers who built the Temples in Jerusalem, even if they were not the most pious of men, were commissioned and directed by righteous people such as Shlomo Hamelech, Ezra and Nechemiah. Not only that, but the entire initiative to build the First and Second Temples came from the prophets of those eras.

And even Herod, the wicked king who funded the renovation of the entire Temple, did so at the counsel of the Rabbis, and left all practical aspects of the building up to them (Bava Basra 4a). But the Zionists did and continue to do everything on their own initiative, without any prophetic or rabbinic direction.

Furthermore, the Gemara says that when artisans worked on the Holy of Holies, they were lowered in inside a box with only a small opening in the spot where they had to work (Pesachim 26a). Regardless of what they did in their private lives, when they came to build the Temple they came only to work, and they worked with great respect for the holy place. The Zionists, on the other hand, came to build not a holy land but a place where they could actualize their dream of secularizing the Jewish people. As Rabbi Chaim Brisker said, "They are not secularizing Jews in order to found a state; they are founding a state in order to secularize the Jews." Instead of comparing them to the workers who built the Temple, it would be more accurate to compare them to Titus, who entered the Holy of Holies with a harlot, committed a vile act, and then stuck his sword into the curtain, claiming that he had defeated G-d in His own house (Gittin 56b).

But the most fundamental problem here is the premise of those who challenged the Zionist rabbi. They seemed to imply that the accomplishments of the Zionists would have been good, if only they had been pious scholars of the Torah. This left the door open for the Zionist rabbi to reply that if an act is good, it does not matter who does it. The truth is, however, that the Torah, the prophets and the Talmud make it clear that Jews settling and building Eretz Yisroel on a major scale is an event that will happen in the days of moshiach, and for any Jews to do it on their own in advance is a great sin, no matter how pious they may be.



True Torah Jews
183 Wilson St. PMB 162
Brooklyn, NY 11211

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